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Hip or hype?

Videogame **marketing** comes of age

Issue twenty-eight

28



As advertising agencies strive to capture the hearts, minds and purse strings of an older, more affluent generation, Edge wonders if such messages are falling on deaf ears. Is the market really on the brink of another boom? Plus: are videogames dangerous? Edge prepares for another media onslaught on the games industry's credibility...





Targeting the trend setters: the console as icon

Videogaming has traditionally sold itself to an adolescent, insular, male-dominated market. Word-of-mouth amongst the school geeks ensured the eighties consoles would always sell.

But the geeks became lawyers, doctors, bankers, and when the geeks grew up so did their taste in games. In the wings 32bit waited to pounce.

The consequence was, and is, plain to see. High-end machines tailored for the affluent buyer are smothering the 16bit market. Sub-£100 consoles are victims in the vicious gaming revolution that is establishing 32bit as the standard. Games are being tailored to a mature, critical audience.

This new market no longer conforms to the conventional rules for selling the game. Flash effects just don't cut the mustard with today's player, so the ad execs have had to re-invent their methods to push consoles as must-have products.

The solution? Target a specific audience, the group leaders, the trend setters, and ensure they want to buy. In turn their choice will influence others, allowing the salesmen to sit back and relax as the ensuing chain reaction ignites.

In the battle for 32bit domination, we have seen Sony-sponsored festivals, *VF* projections on the Houses of Parliament and feathers falling from these very pages. Men's lifestyle magazines, identified by their obsession for posh clothes, fast cars and hi-tech luxuries, have suddenly been graced with 32bit ads. These new consoles are not toys, they are icons.

The **future** is almost here...

inside EDGE





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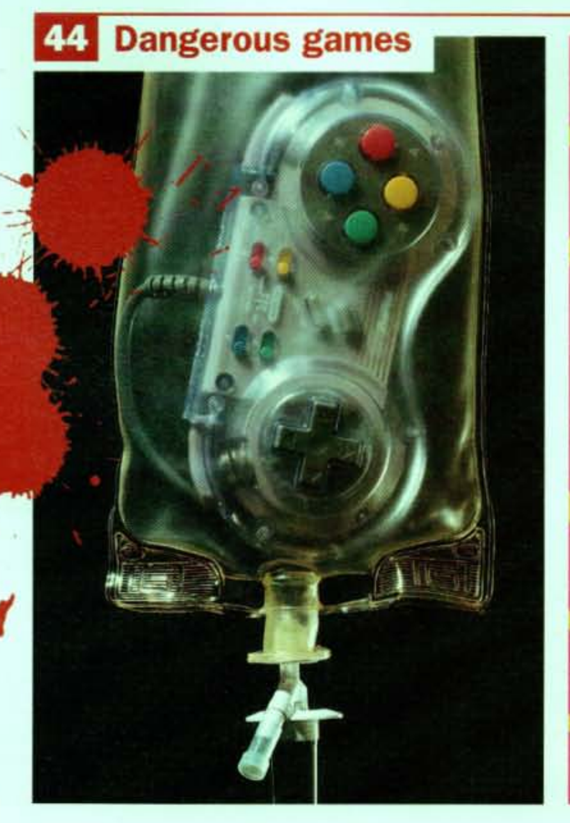














insideview

6 News





Matsushita's head office (left), Nintendo[64] controller (top right), Jaguar VR headset (above)

Prescreen 28



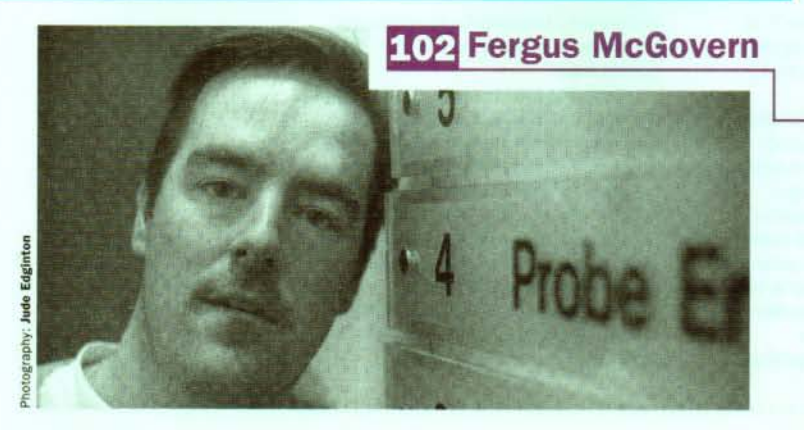

Resident Evil (left) and *Stahlfeder*

Testscreen 66

Virtua Fighter 2 (left) and *Hang On GP 95*




102 Fergus McGovern



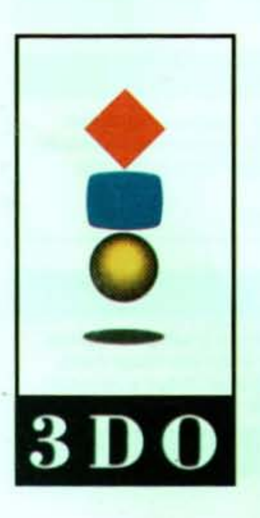
Photography: Jude Edginton



The latest **news** from the world of interactive entertainment

M2 blueprints net 3DO **$100 million**

3DO gets $100m but at the cost of retaining its all-American status



Trip Hawkins' 3DO Company, still struggling with his unconventional sales strategy, has just been given a $100 million boost by Matsushita in a deal which transfers all rights for M2 technology to the Japanese firm.

The agreement, which ends 3DO's ambition of taking on the might of the Japanese manufacturers, requires Matsushita (pronounced Mat-soosh-ta, incidentally) to hand out an initial $100 million, plus additional royalties. In turn, The 3DO Company has committed to hand over all M2 chips and designs for their forthcoming CD and Digital Video Disc (DVD) hardware, giving the Japanese company (the parent firm of 3DO supporter, Panasonic) exclusive use of M2 technology to power future products, including 64bit videogames and DVD/set-top players.

Matsushita will also receive the sub-license rights to M2, giving them ultimate control over the future of 3DO's super-console.

'Today's announcement combines the vast resources of a consumer electronics leader with the industry's most powerful 64bit technology,' commented 3DO CEO Trip Hawkins. 'Matsushita has been a world leader in audio and video and is again poised for success with their central role in the emerging DVD standard. By combining these capabilities with 3DO's interactive graphics and computing technology, Matsushita is positioned for success in many new digital businesses.'



From now on, Matsushita will be the sole licensors of 3DO's M2 technology. The 3DO Company will become largely software-driven

Mikio Higashi, managing director of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co, Ltd, was also in high spirits over the deal. 'In order to succeed in this business we need to acquire the rights and become the licensor of interactive, high-speed, high-performance graphics processing and operating system technology offered by the M2 architecture,' he officially remarked.

This transfer of control leaves The 3DO Company in a position to →



→ concentrate on software development, particularly in the thriving PC sector, while continuing to build state-of-the-art hardware when necessary. It also means the only American-owned console capable of conquering the immense Japanese competition is

Matsushita is likely to pack M2 technology into its planned set-top boxes and Super Density DVD players

the flagging Jaguar, currently going through hard times with its VR headset (see page 11) and wilting reputation.

On the positive side, 3DO can now concentrate on company expansion without the persistent threat from competitors, with M2 development appreciating the input provided by Panasonic's hardware expertise.

On the other hand, the deal probably signifies 3DO's failure to fulfil their promised global standard.

Continuing their good fortune, the pre-Christmas madness may see 3DOs selling for under £200. Both Panasonic and Goldstar, independent developers of 3DO systems, have announced special Christmas deals for the hardware.

Panasonic have introduced a 'three for the price of two' trade deal meaning the retail price can be cut to £249, or perhaps even £199. According to trade paper, Computer Trade Weekly, the normal dealer price for a Panasonic 3DO is around £230, meaning three can now be bought for around £450. Even selling the units to consumers at £250 each will still create a healthy profit margin. However, the trade cost is debatable and Panasonic now refuse to disclose any prices.

Goldstar, on the other hand, are still discussing 3DO Christmas prices. Kieran Sumner, multimedia business manager for Goldstar, told **Edge** two packages were under consideration, either a deal with bundled new software, or a price slash to £199. Sumner was (not surprisingly) confident the Goldstar 3DO was the one to buy. 'The Goldstar machine will be at least as competitive as Panasonic's,' he assured the trade.

With Sega dropping Saturn's price, it looks as if the 32bit Christmas war could be a bloody one.







With the $100 million cash injection from Matsushita, Trip Hawkins has a lot to be cheerful about (top). One of the first M2 projects hyped in Japan is 'D2' (above), continuing Warp's run of success on the 3DO

Who is it?

This A-list Hollywood star now has detailed information regarding his entire career on CD-ROM. He's 65, an ex-mayor and played a role responsible for one of the most parodied lines in film history...



Nintendo64 launch slips into 1996

Controversy continues to surround U64's launch date

it is...

Clint Eastwood, whose CD-ROM contains a time-line of his cinema and TV output. Clint played Dirty Harry in the series of cop films. The line 'Do you feel lucky punk' has plagued us (and him) ever since





Much has been made of this realtime Onyx *Final Fantasy* sequence but the U64 game isn't due until late 1996

According to the Japanese newspaper, the Nippon Kezei, Nintendo has decided to delay the launch of its 64bit console until the spring of 1996, with a lag in software development being cited as the main cause. Launch is apparently now pencilled in for March 31st: a national holiday in Japan, and a time at which all the children are off school.

The issue of the launch date has not been clearly resolved, however. British games industry paper CTW stated in an article on Monday 20th of November that, 'Nintendo could easily surprise everyone and still launch the machine pre-Christmas in Japan and on schedule (April 1, 1996) in the US and Europe'. THE games, Nintendo's UK distributor, has informed **Edge** that it isn't aware of any changes to the U64 launch plan, throwing a certain amount of doubt into rumours concerning any launch delay.

If the Nippon Kezei article is correct and the Japanese launch is delayed, it would almost certainly mean the proposed European and US launch dates would be put back as well. With a March 31st Japanese launch, Americans could possibly expect the machine in September 1996, while Europeans might be kept waiting until 1997. A senior Nintendo watcher, commenting on the launch, assured CTW that, 'If they're not ready for Japan, they're a long way off Europe.'



Borrowing heavily from Sony's PlayStation pad design, the U64's controller is more 'evolutionary' than 'revolutionary' in its ergonomics

Despite the possibility of a launch delay, Nintendo64 activity at the forthcoming Shoshinkei show will still be intense. Several games are being presented nearly complete and many others are previewing on videotape. Amongst the playable demos will be a couple of Nintendo platformers (possibly *Mario* and/or *Donkey Kong*) as well as a single 'Snow Speeder' level from LucasArts' *Shadows of the* →

Control freak

Nintendo's 'revolutionary' controller is apparently light in weight and features not only the unique central analogue thumb-controlled joystick, but also a slot on the back of the joypad that has been designed to take either a memory card or some kind of connecting device. An extra button/trigger is also located underneath.

Attract mode

***Assault Rigs*, from SCE (Psygnosis), follows the new trend for arena based shoot 'em ups (see page 14). The player controls a cyber tank through a virtual maze where enemy tanks await. The intro gives a brief history of videogames, with *Assault Rigs* billed as the culminative experience...**



1 The camera pans in on an arcade unit running *Ping*. In the seventies it was the best in interactive fun since sex. But time waits for no man. Or game... Fade out...



2 Fade in on *R-Type* clone. The player now deals with computer controlled enemies, scrolling landscapes and multiple weapons, but it's still a 2D experience...



3 Cut to a VR title. The game is an immersive experience, but it's none too realistic – the player must venture everywhere with his arm pointing straight out...





This year's Shoshinkai Festival takes place on November 24th and will place the Nintendo64 on the international videogaming map. The Japanese machine has a redesigned logo but is the same shape (right)

→ *Empire*. Puzzle title, *Phear*, and Rare's *Killer Instinct 2* may also be shown. Furthermore, each member of the Ultra 64's infamous 'Dream Team' (to which Electronic Arts have just been signed to produce a 64bit version of *FIFA Soccer*) will have stands at the show and some will be showing video footage of work in progress.



Last year's Shoshinkai festival played host to the distinctly underwhelming Virtual Boy. The second and third days of the show are open to the public and are known as Famicom Space World (above)

Nintendo have issued an interesting brief to the videogames press concerning what they can expect at Shoshinkai. The show will open with a speech by Hiroshi Yamauchi, president of Nintendo Co Ltd, and the first day will also include a media reception by Nintendo of America. The rest of the show looks to be highly organised and regimented: for example, footage of games in development will be made available to journalists and there will be three Nintendo64 units in the press room from which game visuals can be taped directly. Transparencies of screen shots will also be made available, but Nintendo are forbidding the press to take their own screen shot photos on the show floor. Photographers will only be allowed to snap people playing the games.

Controversy surrounding the Nintendo64 launch is bound to be cleared up in Mr Yamauchi's speech on the first day of the Shoshinkai show, which unfortunately takes place after the deadline for this issue. However, **Edge** will provide analysis of that speech, as well as an in-depth report of the show, next month. **E**

VF on PC

Virtua Fighter Remix **will be available on the PC before the end of the year thanks to a bundling deal between Sega and Diamond Multimedia – producers of a 3D accelerator card which allows Saturn games to be converted to Pentium PCs running *Windows '95*.**

The card utilises nVidia Corporation's NV1 technology and will include two controller ports so that Saturn joypads can be used with the PC conversions. The package will be available in Europe at the end of November 1995. Another Sega/Diamond Multimedia bundle will include *Panzer Dragoon*.



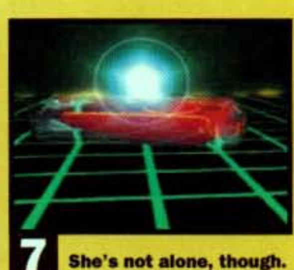
4 **Following the videogame history lesson, a beautifully-animated female character enters the *Battle Rigs* virtual reality unit...**



5 **The hatch on her hydraulic capsule closes... the countdown begins. She is about to enter the new virtual world... the camera follows...**



6 **The viewer enters the *Battle Rigs* arena, which looks very much like a scene from Tron. We see the woman's cyber tank exploring its matrixed digital terrain...**



7 **She's not alone, though. Enter the red tank on the other side of the arena. The battle zone is clearly not big enough for the both of them. Let the assault commence...**

Apple fulfils fast and easy 3D dream

Apple's PowerMac gets its own 3D accelerator card

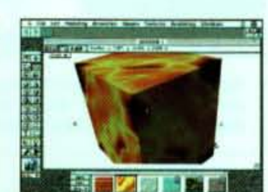
Apple recently announced the launch of the QuickDraw 3D Acceleration Card, a 3D graphics and animation accelerator that works on any PowerMac. At £350, the card can be used with the Mac's plentiful development software while offering an attractive gamesplaying experience for its growing home audience.

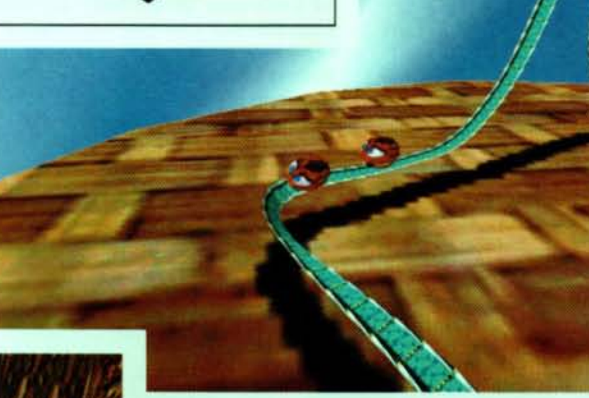
The card works directly with Apple's QuickDraw 3D system software, which is included. While lacking the raw geometrical power of the 3Dlabs GLINT chip, the Apple card gains distinct advantages from its close ties with the software. It means developers have a fresh and flexible way of creating 3D.

Apple's new 3D chip promises 3D graphics and animation accelerated by up to 12 times the normal speed

QuickDraw 3D offers the ability to drag-and-drop texture maps or even QuickTime video clips onto objects. Its 3DMF files, containing object, texture, camera and lighting information can be exchanged between any programs that support the new system.







Software development tools (top) accompany the 3D card, enabling programming teams to create, manipulate and experiment with 3D designs

The accelerator can be plugged into any PowerMac with a PCI slot and works independently of the main processor, so it speeds up 3D to the same level on a £1,200 machine or a £5,000 model. It supports typical 3D algorithms like Gouraud shading and can handle complicated procedures like transparency without slowing down.

Games have to be coded specifically to work with the QuickDraw 3D software, but then automatically work at a higher level once the card is fitted. Already, developers in the thriving Mac games industry are taking advantage of QuickDraw 3D. Interplay's MacPlay division are committed to producing a version of *Descent* that promises to surpass any on other platforms, while *Havoc* is an original Mac-only title from Massachusetts' Reality Bytes. Expect these and more next year.



The quality of the texture-mapping outclasses anything seen on the Saturn or PlayStation, all running in 16bit 640x480 resolution at 30fps

Features

- Works independently of PowerMac CPU, so resolution and colour is based on the host – minimum of 16bit colour at 640x480 pixels.
- Speeds QuickDraw 3D rendering by up to a factor of 12. Renders 10 million trilinearly filtered, MIP-mapped texture pixels per second. Renders up to 120,000 triangles per second. Supports more multiple-monitor access.
- System requirements: any PCI-equipped PowerMac or Mac OS-compatible with 16Mb of RAM and System 7.5.2 or later. Software installation requires a CD-ROM drive.

Atari in virtual reality bust-up

Atari say 'bye' to Virtuality and 'hi' to development on the PC

With rumours circulating throughout the videogames industry concerning Atari's future, it appears the company's VR deal with Virtuality has flopped. The contract, set up in late 1994, was for Virtuality to develop a low-cost HMD (head-mounted display) for Atari, to be compatible with the Jaguar console. Details concerning the collapse have not yet been released, but cogent theories from various sources point to a variety of explanations.

According to VR industry trade monthly, VR News, the breakdown relates to the outcome of evaluations made by Atari during June on a final development prototype supplied by Virtuality. Allegedly, Virtuality felt the project had reached the stage where the next HMD units should include production quality components. This implied that an investment by Atari in production tooling would be required, but Atari felt the development project had not reached the stage where such investment could be justified.

Not all coverage has been so erudite. The Sunday Times, possibly reacting to the VR News story, suggested Atari plan to give up on the Jaguar in favour of PC development – a theory that Atari strongly refute.

In a recent news article, internet videogame site IG Online also speculated over Atari's hardware commitment, quoting a 'reliable source within the Jaguar community' as saying, 'Atari appears to be abandoning the Jaguar in favour of becoming a PC development house. However, they are very busy right now pushing the remaining stock of Jaguar hardware.' Internal sources also indicated to IG that wide-scale lay-offs have been carried out by Atari USA.

Atari rumour control has gone into overdrive on both sides of the Atlantic to clarify the mess. Atari is stressing its plans to continue pushing the Jaguar with increased marketing and new games being produced through outside contracting.

When asked by **Edge** if Jaguar support was to cease, a spokesman from Atari UK said: 'Categorically no. This rumour appears to have originated from the Sunday Times article and is not true. In 1996 we are opening a new software division, Atari Interactive, to concentrate on developing and publishing PC software, starting with *Tempest 2000*. However, more resources in software does not mean less resources in hardware. R&D on the Jag HMD continues, just not with Virtuality.' **Edge**'s source also indicated that work on the Jag 2 project is continuing.

Atari are aggrieved over the Sunday Times article because the reasons over the Virtuality collapse were meant to be secret. Atari's UK spokesman also said the job losses were restricted to a single games development team at Atari USA.

But the question remains, is Atari attempting to re-invent itself in the PC market? It seems the PC is becoming the next battleground for videogame supremacy. Namco and NEC are developing games on the PC (see side story), as are Sega and nVidia. Given Atari's difficulties in competing with these companies in the past, they are by no means guaranteed success in this new arena.



Is the Atari-Virtuality brawl the end of the road for the Jaguar VR headset and Atari's internal hardware development?



Data stream

IBM PC share of UK home computer market, 1995: **66%**
Retail value of UK leisure software industry, 1994: **£538,000,000**
Retail value of German software industry, 1994: **£812,000,000**
Retail Value of Portugal software industry, 1994: **£68,000,000**
Price of Guildsoft's *SmartHeart Plus* – a software title aimed at people with concerns about suffering coronaries: **£345**
Number of games sold by Nintendo since the introduction of the NES in 1983: **1 billion**
Percentage of American homes with a Nintendo system: **40**
Number of games available for Nintendo systems: **2,000**
Number of super models who smoke: **78%**
Number who claim never to have been on a diet: **65%**
Budget for the original Godzilla movie: **$100,000**
Proposed budget for the remake: **$130,000,000**
Amount spent by people in the developed world on plant-based, herbal remedies: **$12.4 billion per annum**
Most annoying television advert according to a survey by the Planning Partnership: **Chicken Tonight**
Cost of Michael Heseltine's new office computer: **£150,000**
Estimated annual running costs: **£10,000**
PlayStation sales in the UK: **50,000 by Nov**
In Europe: **200,000**
Number of complaints received by **Edge** regarding 3DO's recent feather-filled advertisement: **lots**
Likelihood of similar publicity stunts appearing in **Edge** in forthcoming issues: **0%**

What is it?

This ill-fated console runs 32X or Mega CD discs. With a £199 price tag and scheduled for European release this Autumn, it has been ditched. Sega Europe's marketing director, Barry Jafrato, refers to it as, 'a dead project'

NEC/Namco PC deal...

NEC Corporation and Namco have announced an alliance to bring realistic 3D computer graphics to PCs running *Windows '95*. NEC will produce its PowerVR chipsets (see Edge 18) and Namco will develop the games to exploit them. PowerVR is a revolutionary 3D chipset that will provide 3D graphics of a quality superior to those now available on 32bit consoles. A single chipset can run at 200,000 polygons a second. Namco are planning on using the chip to produce games like *Tekken*, *Rave Racer* and *Air Combat 22* on the PC.



BT takes online gaming initiative

British Telecom plan a new over-the-wire games playing service

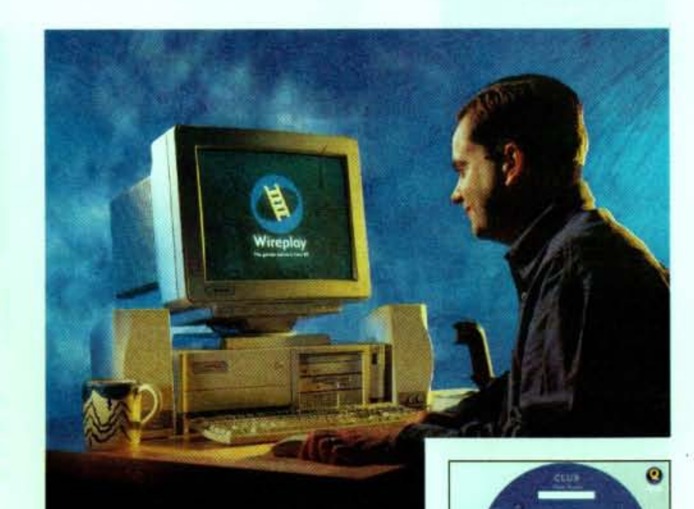
it is...

The Sega Neptune, shelved due to poor 32X sales. Also ditched, the handheld Nomad. Official explanation: competition from the Gameboy. Unofficially: someone forgot to name it after a planet



A nationwide dedicated computer games network allowing players to compete with each other over the existing telephone line could be in homes by Summer next year. The system, called Wireplay, will be piloted in January 96, with a full nationwide launch slated for the following June.

To use Wireplay, prospective customers need a PC (a 386 or above), a modem (at least 9.6 kb/s) and a copy of the game they wish to play. The first time a player logs on to the system they will have to go through a simple registration process where they assign themselves a nickname, password etc. They will then gain access to the notice board: the focus for all user activity and the place where players can read and post game offers. To do so, players must state the level of difficulty at which they wish to play, at what time, and, if they like, who they want to play against. When others log on to the service they can view the offers on the noticeboard and decide whether to take one up or post a new offer of their own.



BT promises Wireplay will provide easy access to online videogaming. Any low-specced PC can be adapted to the system



Players can 'filter' the list of offers on the basis of game, skill level, time to play, etc. Users will also get the opportunity to compete in ladders, leagues and knockout tournaments.

When a challenge between two or more players is set up, the gamers can engage in a pre-game chat to set parameters for the game and discuss tactics. If the game is over-subscribed, the game proposer (the person who posted the offer) may make a final selection of players to participate. During play, the Wireplay service acts as an, 'intelligent router of messages between the two or more participants'.

Registered users will be able to set up clubs of less than 30 players with passwords to restrict access. Parents could therefore set up clubs so their children could only play against friends.

Wireplay will also include a news area with info sub-divided into pages. The site will combine editorial and adverts, and will be created using a limited version of HTML, the language used to mark up web pages on the internet. This reduced implementation will still allow for the display of graphics →



The Wireplay concept, from British Telecom, is the first in a number of multimedia initiatives that the company will be launching in the coming months. Expect to see a dial-up internet access service soon



When logged on, players will be presented by this noticeboard. From here, offers can be made to anybody else connected to the network. The replies can then be filtered until a suitable group is ready to play

Be a beta for Wireplay...

Edge, in conjunction with BT, is able to offer 150 readers the chance to take part in the Wireplay trial, testing from January until June. The pilot will involve a controlled customer base of 1,500 players, each of whom will automatically become members of Club Wireplay. Club members will receive a T-shirt, metallic membership badge, newsletters and access to the advice hotline to let BT know how they are doing with the system.

To apply, send the following details to Edge: the make and model of your PC; whether you have a modem connected and if so, its speed; which games you play, how often you play them and your current favourites; which games mags you read; whether you are an internet user; and whether the phone line is in your name (if not, do you have the holder's permission?).

Send a postcard to:
Edge/BT compo
30 Monmouth Street
Bath
Avon BA1 2BW
The first 150 who qualify will join the trial.

→ and for hyperlinks to other areas of news, however.

BT say the Wireplay concept is a benefit to PC owners and the software industry. Possibilities lie in older videogame titles being re-released with Wireplay compatibility added, increasing individual games' revenues and making back catalogues 'much more valuable'.

Rupert Gavin, Director of multimedia services, said Wireplay represents only a part of BT's commitment to online infotainment: 'Wireplay is one of a number of multimedia initiatives that BT will be launching in the coming months. BT believes the internet offers many possibilities, which we are pursuing.'

BT state that the service will be 'affordable' with a single usage-based charge (pay as you play). There will be no subscriptions, no separate telephone charges and it will cost the same to play wherever your opponent is in the country. No actual prices have been released at this stage, though.

When Wireplay was publicly announced in the UK, at the Live 95 Consumer Electronics Show in September, a prototype of the system was demonstrated using *Virtual Pool* and *Descent* from Interplay. This allowed visitors to set up games and play each other via the phone network and a server located in York.

BT is currently working with Acclaim, Electronic Arts, Gremlin Interactive, Microprose and VIE, amongst others, to produce Wireplay compatible software. Games with in-built compatibility will offer a Wireplay option on the menu screen, but older games could also make use of the system through separate software which BT hopes to distribute.



Edge pays respect to the UK media's videogame coverage. From dangerous subliminal messages to body piercing...

Drug-pushing psychos

It's the sense of balance and proportion that makes our media the envy of the civilised world. So when we're informed by as august an organ as the Sunday Times that children have been 'drugged by computer game hidden messages' it's probably time for a reality check.

According to the ST, Time Warner's *Endorfun* was 'written by the programmer who produced Tetris' and can subliminally induce a state of 'trance-like' positivity in the unwary gamester. Apparently, the game sends sub-auditory messages not consciously registered but nonetheless stimulating the brain to release endorphins, a chemical producing a natural high. The offending messages include: 'I expect pleasure and satisfaction' and 'I forgive myself completely'. Alarmed academics have been quick to point out that it could be dangerous overriding one's natural proclivities with these cheap feel-good sentiments.

You can hear the distraught parents' cry: 'Our little Johnny's tidy bedroom and excellent marks at school are a cause of real concern. Before he started playing that terrible game he was just a normal boy with normal desires like reading Razzle and urinating over the neighbour's Vauxhall Tigra'. **source:** Sunday Times, 8/10/95

VR balls-up

Eager to uphold its reputation for incisive and well-researched journalism, the Sunset Times caused further ructions in the games industry recently when it broke news of the dissipation of the Atari/Virtuality deal (see page 11). However, it was the paper's allegation that the company also planned to quit the console market altogether that caused a few angry faces at Atari's Sunnyvale HQ. According to respected games industry rag, CTW, this more damaging claim possibly emanated from a disgruntled Virtuality keen to assign the blame for the abandoned VR headset deal to Atari's diminishing faith in its own machine. **source:** Sunday Times, 29/10/95

'Mummy, look at this...'

Total Reality, a low-budget Children's BBC show covering interactive entertainment for kids, stumbled into potentially embarrassing territory during its first airing when a Japanese report on teen gaming idol Chiba Rei included the internet address of the 20-year-old's homepage. Unsuspecting youngsters with a desire to get to know Japan's undisputed technophile goddess would have no doubt been fascinated by the pictures of pierced nipples and penises that lay just one Web link away...



PlayStation tightens grip on Japan

New Playstation games were prolific at the machine's first dedicated Japanese show



Capcom's strong presence included three beat 'em ups (*SF Movie, SF Zero, Vampire*) and the excellent *Biohazard*



SCE's *Horned Owl* (right) is a gun game set to rival *Virtua Cop*. Once again the Saturn-PlayStation line up is mirrored...







...and there's a gun (by Konami) to compete with *V Cop. Beyond The Beyond* (top)









Beat 'em ups were given a healthy airing at the PlayStation Expo. From top: *Vampire*, aka *Dark Stalkers* in the UK, *Street Fighter Zero* and Takara's *Battle Arena Toshinden 2* all tried to offer something new

As reported in **Edge** 27, the first PlayStation Expo, held in Harumi, Tokyo, was a well-attended success attracting vast crowds before it had even opened. Desperate teenage gamers actually camped outside the exhibition centre in order to play the games first – an obsessive devotion symbolising a show aimed squarely at the consumer.

Capcom made its presence strongly felt showing *Street Fighter Movie* (an adaptation of the Japanese anime cartoon, not the tragic Hollywood effort), *Street Fighter Zero* (also planned for the Saturn), the stunning *Biohazard* (aka *Resident Evil* – see page 28) and *Vampire* (aka *Dark Stalkers*). Arch rival Namco also had a characteristically large presence showing off *Ridge Racer Revolution* on linked PlayStations to good effect (the game comes with *Galaga 88* as the front-end load-up game). Also worth a look was Namco's *Museum Piece Vol. 1* CD which **Edge** discovered uses the original coin-ops' code through emulation programs on the PlayStation. Other planned Namco releases include *Galaxian³* (which includes a widescreen mode), *Super Family Stadium 5* (baseball), *Tekken II* and *Soul Edge*.

Tecno Soft presented their *Reverthion* – a kind of cross between *Destruction Derby* and *Tekken*, but with robots. Supporting simultaneous two player action, the game takes place in a vast arena with each participant taking on the role of a robot that has to hunt down and destroy the other. Also on show was *Firemen 2* from Human – a top-down-view game converted from an old SNES title. The player takes on the role of a fireman and has to – wait for it – put out fires.

Finally, despite the wealth of good software at PlayStation Expo, **Edge** was most disappointed not to see Konami's new *Castlevania (Dracula X)* game on the PlayStation (**Edge** 27). Confirming early fears that it looked uncomfortably 16bit, it seems the company has seen sense and has delayed the game until October 1996.





***Ridge Racer Revolution*, the latest in the series, was especially popular with Namco staff (top)**

Datebook

December 1995

Internet World International – Winter 95, December 5-7, Olympia 2, London.
Tel: **44 (0)1865 730275**

Expo Comm – China South, December 5-9, Guanghzou Foreign Trade Exhibition Centre, Guanghzou, China.
Tel: **301/986-7800**

Supergames Moscow 95, December 7-10, Krasnaya Presnya International Exhibition Centre, Moscow, Russia. Contact ITE Exhibitions & Conferences, Ltd.
Tel: **44 (0)171 286 9720**

January 1996

Amusement Trade Exhibition International (ATEI), January 23-25, Earl's Court, London.
Tel: 44 (0)171 713 0302

International Winter Consumer Electronics Show, January 5-8, Las Vegas Convention Centre, Sahara Hotel and Sands Hotel, Las Vegas, NV, USA.
Tel: **1 703 907 7600** (minimal videogame presence this year – Los Angeles E³ show next big event).

February 1996

Milia, February 9-12, Palais des Festivals, Cannes, France. Contact Milia.
Tel: **1 212 689 4220**

Digital Hollywood, February 20-22, Los Angeles, California, USA. Contact American Expositions.
Tel: **1 212 226 4141**

COMDEX/ComExpo, February 27-March 1, The Sports Palace, Mexico City, Mexico.
Tel: **1 617 449 6600**

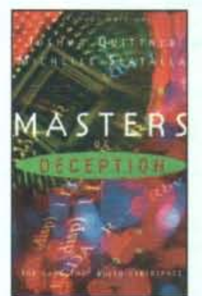
March 1996

PC 96 – The 28th Personal Computer Show, March 5-8, Darling Harbour, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.
Tel: **61 3 867 4500**

Show organisers: if your show isn't listed here, it's only because you haven't told **Edge** about it. Telephone us on **01225 442244**, fax us on **01225 446019**, or send details to **Datebook, Edge, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW**

Essential reading

Masters of Deception



• by Joshua Quittner and Michelle Slatalla (Vintage, £6.99)

Videogames have a lot to answer for. Epilepsy alarms, *Street Fighter: The Movie* and, of course, *Crescent Galaxy* on the Jaguar. For thirteen-year-old Paul William Stira or 'Scorpion' as he would come to be known across the bulletin boards of America, it was his taste for 'defeating the troll' (cracking the copyright protection on Commodore 64 classics such as *Annihilator*) that would eventually lead to his arrest and ignominious imprisonment. The bridge between a spot of pubescent software piracy and federal crime was the advent of the modem. The advent of hacking.

Inured as we are to the novelties of the net it's hard to appreciate what it must have been like to log on to a new electronic frontier in 1984. Bright and often fairly poor kids like Paul, locked away in bedrooms 'so small that the corners of everything touch', became utterly intoxicated by the power and influence they could wield in this medium. Once armed with a jazzy nom de net, your race, creed and colour a mystery, the only barrier between you and success was the quality of the illegal information you had to offer – 'any kid with a modem talks about hacking the phone system in the same way that any kid talks about getting laid. It happens. But rarely – and usually to someone else'. 'Lamers' soon got rousted and 'kewl dewds' with hot hacks quickly formed gangs and set up controlled access bulletin boards. Paul, enjoying some small renown for his growing repertoire of War Games-style free-phone tricks, was desperate to join the most revered of the cyber gangs, The Legion of Doom. He never made it, but in the attempt he 'met' some interesting people: Phiber Optik, Acid Phreak and Hac. Together they formed a new gang, MOD. Masters of Deception. Two years later, having humiliated the Legion of Doom's legendary leader, Eric Bloodaxe, and courted the attentions of big-time TV, they were the most feared and celebrated hackers in the world.

It's an exciting story superbly told, the authors skillfully charting the converging courses of the MOD and their increasingly glamourous exploits (calling up the President's credit history!) and the dim but relentless pursuit by the feds. The breathless excitement of penetrating 'secure' systems is so well captured that when the boys finally go down for selling credit reports you feel it's an aberration. What really motivated them was intelligent curiosity and the opportunity to harmlessly show off and be something. Not a chance afforded them in the 'real' world.



Express yourself in **Edge**. Write to: **Edge** letters, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW

While travelling on the bus the other day not only did I almost collapse from a heart attack, thinking some poor feathered friend had got caught in the presses, but the entire contents of the magazine were caught by a gust of wind. Most of the passengers where too shocked to even laugh, and I made a hasty departure at the next stop with my street cred registering nil points. Some poor old dear, I noticed, spat a feather from her teeth. I just hate to think what the more animal-friendly readers would make of all this. I think a PlayStation would go some way to compensate me for this obviously distressing time.

Richard Cowdery, Richard@shazam.demon.co.uk

Apologies go out to all those who suffered at the hands of 3DO's hijacking of **Edge** 27. The magazine in no way condones these kind of stunts but sadly it can't stretch to supplying you a PlayStation. Sony hasn't even provided **Edge** with a PAL machine yet...

I have noticed that some people are concerned about the loading times of CD-based games... why?

I'm farty enough to remember the good old days of the Speccy and C64 and cassette-based software. I fondly remember loading a game and nervously watching the title screen build up for three hours, then that heart-stopping moment when it blanked for the final three hours of the loading process. The sweaty palms, the nervous tension, the near-orgasmic anticipation – fantastic.

Of course what followed was the ultimate disappointment when you played the game and found out it was pretty crap.

Forget carts, quad-speed CD drives and instant gratification. Make loading times longer, that's what I say. Think of it as foreplay (it's usually the best bit!)

J Tuffnail, Rushden, Northants

Tape loading times were probably responsible for the premature ageing of games players in the early to mid eighties. But **Edge** agrees that there was something curiously gripping about watching those numbers creep up and up... only to watch them stop a couple of digits short of completion and the game bomb out. The Saturn and PlayStation seem to have nailed this problem to a large extent, although less adept hardware (such as the 3DO and Neo Geo CD) still suffer from incumbent hold-ups during loading.



***Pulstar* on the Neo Geo CD (above) takes a near eternity to load off the single-speed CD drive, but J Tuffnail thinks that's what's missing today**

I was infuriated to hear Trip Hawkins slagging off the Ultra 64 in **Edge** 26. Firstly, he stated that nothing about the Ultra 64 is 64bit when it is known that the console has RISC-based 64bit 'reality immersion'. He then goes on to say that the Ultra 64 is 'certainly not a good enough product to compete effectively against 32bit machines'. How can he possibly justify this when, technically, the Ultra 64 outclasses the Saturn, PlayStation and 3DO?

Personally, I think he is jealous because Nintendo's machine will beat the pants off his precious 3DO and its laughable software. He also points out that the Ultra 64 has no CD drive and is therefore an inferior product to every other 32bit machine. I will enjoy seeing him eating his words when Nintendo preview their 'bulky' drive at the Shoshinkai show in November. This is an optical storage device, much like Sony's minidisc, that will allegedly hold between 100 and 150Mb of data with a retrieval rate some eight times faster than that of the PlayStation and the Saturn. Nice try Trip, but no cigar.

Matthew Tulloch, Darlington, Co Durham

Trip Hawkins doesn't shy away from bashing the competition, and who could blame him? His rivals have enjoyed using 3DO as a punchbag for the last two years. His remarks should obviously be taken with a healthy dose of scepticism, though – after all, he is just hyping his own technology, M2 (that has just netted him $100 million from Matsushita – see news).

Like so many of your readers, I was becoming increasingly concerned about **Edge**'s views on the Sony PlayStation and its effect on the competition. I think, in hindsight, a lot of my concerns were due to the fact that my 3DO was not as good in technical and gaming terms as the PlayStation – sometimes the truth hurts and we do not like to hear it.

On September 28th I was in my local HMV store and, for the first time, I saw the PlayStation in action. To say I was impressed is an understatement. It's not a pleasant experience seeing a console I had bought only six months ago being kicked into touch by one £100 cheaper. I picked up the PlayStation pad, I played the demo disc for ten minutes and then spent £450 on hardware and software.

Nothing, I mean nothing, compared to the buzz I felt playing *Ridge Racer*, *Wipeout*, etc, on this console. The demo disc was showing software which was beyond anything on the 3DO and, I suspect, the Saturn. I guess on the 28th of September there were many 3DO and Saturn owners who also found themselves walking into an HMV or Virgin Megastore and leaving with a light grey box to replace the one under their TV.

My 3DO is now for sale, but somehow I feel I will not be inundated with calls from potential buyers. I now have a PlayStation instead of a 3DO, not because it is the latest piece of kit or the most powerful, but because it has the most potential and, in my opinion, the best games. Something the 3DO never had, regrettably (not for lack of me hoping).

Graham Davis, Cheshire



Trip Hawkins' bullish comments about 3DO and M2 have irritated Matthew Tulloch, but isn't it time Trip fought back?

I do not understand from where the accusation of **Edge** being biased towards Sony's PlayStation arises. Future Publishing were awarded the official magazine, probably because they produce the finest computing magazines, and their ABC ratings attest to a strong, loyal readership. **Edge** only seems to take a stance based on the current state of the games industry. No doubt **Edge** has good contacts with Sony, but the editorial stance of the magazine has always been impartial, and there is no evidence of that changing.

3DO owners who feel their current system is being ignored, or M2's coverage is limited, cannot really complain. 3DO is an excellent machine, and the 'Don't play a Dodo, play 3DO' phrase (plus sticking feathers to the pages of **Edge** 27) is worthy of note. Fair enough, the 3DO facilitates easy upgrades but the current software range only has a few worthy titles. I would rather buy a system now, play it to death, and enjoy it while it lasts. Who says M2 will have better games?

I believe **Edge** is confident with Sony, not biased towards, as is the rest of the industry. Sony have delivered on time, at the right price, with no shortage of stock (or RF leads), and with superb games. I have yet to see any game on 3DO, Jaguar, or Saturn that would inspire me to buy any of them. They don't have bad software, it's just uninspiring.

Edge will inevitably be gearing up for the launch of the Ultra 64. If Nintendo can get good games released (which they certainly can), and more importantly the price of the software (less than £50) then the industry will feel just as much confidence in the Ultra 64 as the PlayStation.

Colin Neal, Reading



Graham Davis was more than impressed by the PlayStation demos running in his local HMV and reckons complaints from readers over Edge's coverage of Sony are 3DO and Saturn owners running scared

I am quite surprised to see a magazine of your calibre making such naive comments on the state of the SNES market. You say (in **Edge** 23), that 'the SNES is being put out to grass far to early'. But isn't **Edge** (and other magazines) helping to drive the nail into the SNES coffin? All this premature next generation hype has caused nullification in the market.

After over six months, the Saturn and PlayStation have only three games between them which have scored nine out of ten. Both machines have very little outstanding software in the pipeline, other than perhaps *Destruction Derby*. In **Edge** 23 you reviewed games like *Puzzle Bobble*, *Ultra Vortex* and *Gran Chaser*. Why? All three were poor, sad examples of next generation nothingness.

I'm not saying just review SNES games because you are, after all, a next generation magazine, but how many titles out of *DKC2*, *ISS2*, *Yoshi's Island*, *Doom*, *Killer Instinct* and *Starfox 2* would (if you reviewed them) receive nine out of ten? Probably three quarters, yet while the SNES receives these titles, you still talk of next generation super games – where are they?

The 16bit market may be dying but at least Nintendo are giving we SNES owners quality software that surpasses all the graphical firework displays that the Saturn et al can muster.

To conclude, you say 'the SNES deserved better' – though it's not dead yet. If more coverage is given it won't be.

Simon Birks, Cannock, Staffs

Issue 23's comments weren't intended as an assault on the SNES – the magazine was simply lamenting the dearth of decent games on the system. To be fair, your letter arrived just before the glut of quality SNES titles that have graced the pages of **Edge** since. Titles such as *Yoshi's Island* and *Secret Of Mana 2* show the SNES can still play host to the best software. As long as that keeps coming, **Edge** intends to cover the SNES.

I think it's about time some of your readers quit their incessant complaining. I write mainly in

Continued next page

viewpoint

response to Daniel Densley's letter (**Edge** 26) but also to a disturbingly large proportion of people who's letters get published in 'viewpoint' each month.

If **Edge** implemented every suggestion made by some of the halfwits who write in, we would end up with yet another sub-standard magazine. **Edge** strives to be different and succeeds brilliantly in every aspect of what it does. It is undoubtedly the best multiformat magazine on the market.

If you don't want to hear negative things about your beloved console, especially those of you who own 3DOs and Jaguars, then don't buy probably the most impartial magazine on the market.

Angus, Norwich

After reading Anon's letter regarding 3DO (**Edge** 25), I think maybe it's time someone said something in favour of 3DO.

Firstly, a few facts that aren't in dispute:

a) 3DO was the victim of an abysmal launch strategy.
b) 3DO still has no 'flagship' killer app.
c) 3DO isn't being helped by being last year's new technology.

However, I've owned a 3DO since its UK launch and have never regretted the purchase. Unlike the SNES and Megadrive I also own, which have both been back in their boxes since around two months after they were bought. Why?

3DO doesn't suffer from 'shovelware', ie 101 titles of any given game of which only one (if you're lucky) is worth loading up. This is perhaps the biggest factor in the demise of the 16bit machines and unfortunately looks like being repeated on Sony's PlayStation. While 3DO has no killer app as yet, what titles do exist are generally of reasonably high quality (bar one or two turkeys such as *Starblade*). Why have a huge software base if most of it is unplayable?

All new machines deserve a chance to prove themselves. Due to the 3DO Company having taken some time to find its feet and learn the meaning of the word 'promotion', 3DO is only getting that chance now. There is an avalanche of potentially



Paul Biggs believes the Acorn lays the foundations perfectly for would-be game coders

stunning software coming up for release at the moment which would allow even the current system to hold its own against the Saturn and PlayStation (*PO'ed*, *Space Hulk*, *Battlesport* and *Prowler*, among others).

I'm confident 3DO will soon prove the doubters wrong, and that Sony and Sega will soon find themselves in an unexpected three-way tussle. As for M2, treat it as a separate machine and let M1 develop its own way. It's a great machine and should be given the recognition it deserves.

Bryan Morton, Bangor, Co Down

You seem to misunderstand the term 'shovelware'. Any title that has appeared on another format first and has not been sufficiently upgraded on its journey across counts as shovelware. Some of it may be strong enough to get by (*Alone In The Dark 2*, for example) but usually such software fails to exploit the abilities of the machine you own. But your suggestion that the demise of 16bit machines has been due to a lack of quality games is absurd – **Edge** would venture that the number of outstanding SNES games outnumbers all the average titles on 3DO.

Your advice to Matthew Ward in **Edge** 22 was a tad unhelpful – there was a time when just about every 15 year-old was knocking out space derivatives for the Spectrum or Beeb or whatever. The reason the UK games industry is so important today is that some of them had the commitment to develop their skills into the creative talents that we see today. If Matthew Ward wants to supplement the basic skills that he's learning at school he could do a lot worse than buying an Acorn A3010. These machines are only about £150 at the moment and are probably compatible with what he's using at school. If his budget is a little larger he may consider the new cut down RISC PCs rumoured to be launched in the next few months. There are several programming books available for the Acorn range aimed at all levels of expertise from beginner upwards and support from organisations such as the The ARM Club. Programming skills learnt on one platform are generally transferable and companies such as Simis (*Mig 29*) and Fednet (*Starfighter 3000*, *Stunt Racer 2000*) started out on the Acorn platform.

Paul Biggs, Ashton-on-Trent

True, the Acorn is a good machine to learn on, but it's debatable whether the machine would be a better choice than a PC for assimilating skills for games development. The use of Acorn's computers in schools is less widespread than, say, five years ago and universities are now mostly geared up for using PCs.

Despite having almost a year in which to optimise game code to run on PAL versions of the Sony PlayStation, the UK version of *Ridge Racer* has been released with a letter-boxed display and with what **Edge** terms a sluggish frame rate. Given that *Ridge Racer* has been billed as a 'killer app' for the PlayStation (and thus warranted due care and attention to produce a faithful, fast and full-screen conversion to attract punters to Sony's machine) surely this raises doubts about Sony's commitment to release full-screen, full-speed PAL conversions of other games. In particular, I refer to the imminent release of *Tekken* in the UK, since what I saw on ITV's Bad influence (1st November) this will also run with a squashed, letter-box display. Comments please?

R.G. Scollar, Bath

Once a game has been completed in NTSC format it does require substantial recoding to optimise it for PAL. For this reason, Namco probably realised that it wasn't worth taking programmers off new projects just to make enhancements to the European version (which would ship in smaller numbers than in Japan or the US). Hopefully, in future, Namco will spend time optimising PAL software, as it seems Sega are keen enough to make their PAL games as good as their NTSC counterparts. Regarding the PAL version of *Tekken*, as the game runs at a much higher frame rate than *Ridge Racer* the lower speed (50fps) isn't quite so noticeable.



Simon Birks thinks games like *Mario RPG* (above) are being dismissed for lesser quality titles because of the furore over the 32bit consoles

IG Online

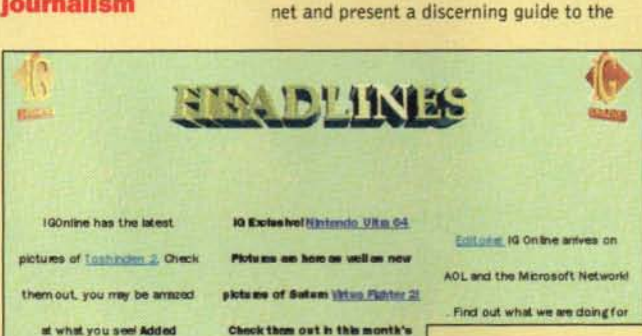
In the first part of a new regular section, Edge connects to the Internet in search of the best online videogames journalism

It is the most important thing to happen to computer technology, maybe even society, for the last five years. But unless you know where to look, the Internet can seem like an endless parade of dodgy chat sites and sad anorak sci-fi pages. In fact, there is a wealth of videogame information in cyberspace for anybody who has the time to hunt it out. From this month on, **Edge** will endeavour to take the surf out of the net and present a discerning guide to the videogame infobahn, featuring different sites in each issue, weighing up their pros & cons and, most importantly, telling you where to find them. This month unrivalled American gaming site IG Online comes under scrutiny.

Site:	**Intelligent Gamer Online**
Address:	**http://igonline.escape.com/igons.html**
Format:	**Online videogames magazine**
Origin:	**Amherst, New York, US**



IG Online presents well-presented, Netscape-friendly pages, with easy-to-find links to other sections







Intelligent Gamer Online provides in-depth reviews of the latest games (top), news stories on forthcoming products (middle) and rumour and speculation about new games (above)

Intelligent Gamer Online is a videogame magazine – like **Edge** – aimed at the higher end of the consumer market. Jer Horwitz, the senior editor, told **Edge**, 'Our audience is a group of informed consumers who have money to spend, rather than the younger audience which wants advice on getting past the first level in *Batman Forever*.' This is a site packed with information, reviews and analysis of a very high standard.

The magazine is split into a number of sections. Each is regularly updated to provide the latest information and each page has a quick access menu that allows steps to be retraced, or other pages of the mag to be accessed quickly.

Perhaps the most interesting areas of IG are its news sections. There are several features and in-depth articles focusing on specific companies and games. There is also a large preview section and a number of hardware reports. Most impressive is the speed at which IG keeps its readers informed, and how it manages to (exhaustively) cover the most exciting developments.

There's also a link to Scott McCall's Ultra 64 page, packed with facts about the console. Articles include a profile of the companies making up the so-called 'Dream Team' – including (where available) the web sites for each, detailed U64 specs and Nintendo PR information. This is an incredibly deep guide to the Ultra 64 and perhaps the most extensive and reliable available.

IG's pronto news section is full of brief reports, of which half are fact and half (more interestingly) are rumour and speculation. This month sees news concerning the M2, a Jamma report and early conjecture regarding *VF3*.

The review section covers at least 15 game reviews for each main platform with attention also given to less 'trendy' formats such as the Jaguar and Virtual Boy as well as old-timers like the SNES. Other features include a regular conference slot where IG users question prominent figures in the computer and videogames industry.

Despite its remit as a haven for the terminally game-obsessed, IG Online is a highly professional, well presented and interesting site. The content is aimed squarely at gamers with a hunger for the latest in videogames news and it doesn't let them down.

Features...

Pronto News
A superbly informative section of news detailing the Saturn's acquisition of former PlayStation exclusives, the new Ultra 64 controller and speculation over Sega's involvement with M2

Reviews
Arcade, home console and PC games reviewed

Mail
Lively email/letters page. Lengthy, in-depth replies.

IG Interactive
Online conferences with industry pundits. Transcripts of previous conferences are available to look at on the site

Archive
Features and reviews from previous issues

Links
Direct access to Scott McCall's U64 Page: http://igonline.escape.com/capscott/nu64-cap.htm

As more developers adopt standard techniques to realise their gaming concepts, Edge singles out a team who has been raising the coding ceiling for some time. Recently offered an alleged $8m for their PC debut and three related projects, Scavenger talks tech

Into the **Shadows**

Format:	**PC CD-ROM**
Publisher:	**Scavenger**
Developer:	**In-house**

Now 32bit technology has slipped into the mainstream and software developers have had time to assess the abilities of each platform, it is hard to get excited over million colour palettes and texture-mapped polygons. Thankfully, several innovative companies exist who are already looking to the future and pushing hardware to the limits.

Hence the introduction of techview, a showcase for designers making true breakthroughs in realtime graphics, game design and sound. Over the coming months, **Edge** will be cherry-picking the best examples of design and programming talent and exhibiting the standards for other developers to reach. First up is Scavenger, the LA-based development company responsible for 16bit Sega titles *Sub-Terrania* and *Red Zone*. The company's policy for never importing graphics technologies, instead developing their own, has already placed it in the **Edge** spotlight in the form of an extended prescreen feature (**Edge** 25). Now the company is in the limelight again. This time for a more detailed look at its innovative and somewhat crafty approach to PC graphics...



Scavenger are programming entrepreneurs attempting to trick every ounce of graphical ability out of the PC

SCAVENGER

***Into the** Shadows* is a D&D-style game with puzzles and maze-like locations, but with the emphasis placed firmly on action, and more specifically, fighting. It's a game that exhibits truly extraordinary graphical quality. The scenery is incredibly detailed and atmospheric with slimy dungeon walls and flaming torches that are crisp and beautifully drawn. Most impressive is the game's cast of characters: elves, wizards, etc who look gorgeous and exhibit an unparalleled fluidity of motion – not an easy task with the antiquated PC hardware.

The techniques involved are no more glamourous than the creative use of mathematics. Where other developers struggle to conform to the





All of *Into the Shadows*' characters have been fully motion captured with the Polyhemus system, creating an unrivalled fluidity and realism







Into the Shadows features amazing animation (above). The game will be transferred to the Saturn and PlayStation



This skeleton warrior sways and lurches in an incredibly lifelike way. The shadows cast by the iron doors (top) detract from the PC's low res

D&D setting

Scavenger have chosen to exhibit their beloved editor in a suitably eerie environment. Dungeons and Dragons games have been around since the 8bit days, but recently the genre has been dominated, if not hijacked completely, by Japanese RPGs in the *Zelda* style. To win players back to the *Dungeon Master* way of doing things, Small is seeking to create a believable scenario in which players can immerse themselves. In this respect, Scavenger is pushing the graphics engine as a means to accentuate the quality of the game, rather than make up for a lack of it: 'We're really trying to meet the interest group that enjoys this type of Dungeons and Dragons fantasy and we're trying to remain faithful to that group, and provide the most realistic environment in which to play.'

PC's primitive architecture and operate within its strict confines, Scavenger are programming entrepreneurs, attempting to trick every ounce of graphical ability out of the machine. As Daniel Small told **Edge**, 'Every machine can do something it's not supposed to, and we have the tricks to exploit this.' These graphical deceptions are used throughout *Into the Shadows* to fool both the player and, more intriguingly, the computer, into thinking incredibly complex things are happening on-screen, when in fact simpler things are taking place – they're just being aided by algorithmic tricks and short cuts.

Mikko Thatinen, one of the lead developers on the *Into the Shadows* project, was willing to give **Edge** a few glimpses into the workings of the Triton graphics engine. *ITS* first captures the imagination with its brilliant animation. The characters are incredibly detailed, intricately animated figures, yet they're utilising an anorexic 100 to 350 polygons. Thatinen explains this paradox with a furtive admission, 'We utilise a doubling and transparency technique to give the appearance that we use more polygons.'

The shadows cast by the characters provide another graphically impressive element. It looks as if they are formed from real shading affected by light sources within the game and, indeed, the shadows are calculated in realtime. However, Thatinen points out there are limits to how much the PC can calculate, so alternative techniques are employed to make the effect appear real. The team have in essence used physics and complex algorithms to create 'elegant short cuts'.

At the heart of all this chicanery is a complex, state-of-the-art editor, which Small is extremely proud of. 'I've seen some editors that people show' he says with a hint of derision, 'but the tools we've developed to make the game are just as impressive as the work itself... it's very in-depth.'

Reassuringly, technological innovation is not the company's overridng ambition. Gameplay is just as important to Scavenger. As Daniel Small told **Edge**, 'The game that is all the rage at Scavenger at the moment is *Yoshi's Island*. We feel the graphics are unattractive, but the gameplay is so much fun. One day we would like to work with Mr Miyamoto. He is truly a wizard' For a look at Scavenger's amazing work on the Saturn, see pages 34 and 35.





Scorcher (top) and *Amok* (above) are evidence of Scavenger's dedication to ground-breaking graphics. Appearing on the Saturn, both games feature fully depth-cued, lightsourced, z-buffered scenery





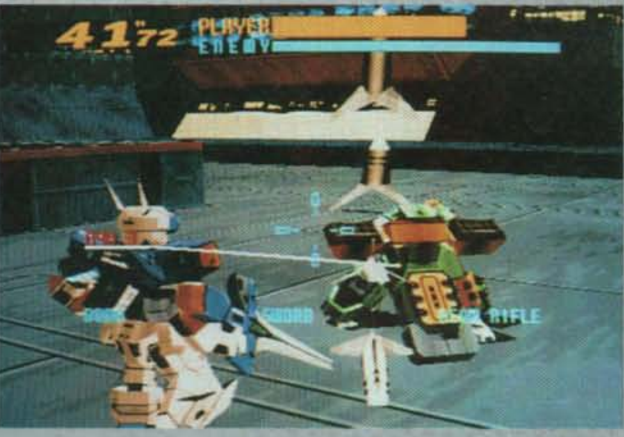
Good texturing and motion capture ensure that the characters look detailed and move convincingly

With the continuing trend for coin-ops crossing over to the home consoles, **Edge** takes a look at the popular titles in the arcades, starting with some of the games featured at this year's Jamma show

Virtual-On Den-no-sen-ki

Developer:	**Sega AM3**
UK release date:	**TBA**
Origin:	**Japan**











***Virtual-On* promises to take the arena-style beat 'em up a step further with robots wielding heavy duty artillery. The incredible 60fps visuals should keep AM3 devotees well-pleased**

The trend for futuristic, mechanised battle games continues with the forthcoming release of AM3's model 2 title, *Virtual-On*. Following the premise set by Namco's *Cyber-Sled* and *Cyber Commando*, AM3, perhaps in an effort to maintain Sega-Namco rivalry, have taken the tank destruction game blueprints and developed them into a game with a few intrinsic differences.

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the Sega and Namco titles is that AM3 have chosen to employ robots rather than armoured vehicles. From an aesthetic standpoint, this seems to have been a good decision. The robots are visually stunning and incredibly detailed, not surprising as they have been designed by the team who worked on the last OAV (original animation video) of Gundam, the seminal robot war series. Not only do the robots look impressive in stills, they also work well in the game, due to some intricate and careful animation.

As well as silky smooth animation and detailed design, each robot boasts a huge range of weapons including lasers, rockets and machine guns. The designers of *Virtual-On* have also introduced an element of realism into battle with the employment of believable trajectory. When a rocket is fired its flight path is curved, as in real life.

AM3 have gone for an interactive approach in *Virtual-On*. The camera shoots in on any action, pans around, and jump cuts to give the impression of speed and accentuate excitement. The camera can also focus explicitly on explosions and, when a robot is destroyed, it zooms in on the blast from several angles: a rather slick and cinematic effect.

Incredibly, considering the high level of detail in the animation, robot design and backgrounds, the version **Edge** played at Jamma was running at a smooth 60fps. This combination of detail, speed and fluid animation will surely mean another success for AM3.

19XX

Developer: **Capcom**
UK release date: **TBA**
Origin: **Japan**



The strangely titled *19XX* bears more than a passing resemblance to its 8bit predecessor, *1941*. Expect more colourful graphics, though, and some much larger sprites

Presented at both Jamma and the PlayStation Expo, *19XX* is another sequel to Capcom's highly successful mid-eighties' coin-op, *1941*, and another title to run on Capcom's CPS2 system. Instead of going for a complete re-styling of the ageing game premise, designers have chosen to take the 8bit original and simply update it, keeping the basic game more or less intact. The player will still have a choice of three planes – a P38, a Mosquito and a Japanese hybrid craft (the same planes available in the original, incidentally) – but now the sprites are bigger, especially on the end of level bosses. The game is also much more colourful than its predecessor, but that is more or less where the distinction ends.





Capcom's *19XX* once again confirms the popularity of the vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up in the arcades

Is this a little cheeky? Probably, but all they are doing is following the simple premise that if it ain't broke don't fix it. *1941* is still popular in the Japanese arcades, so updating it in this way is a cheap and easy way of extending its life expectancy.

Crypt Killers

Developer: **Konami**
UK release date: **TBA**
Origin: **Japan**

Arcade charts

Top ten PCBs	weeks in charts
1 Tekken 2 (Namco)	12
2 Mega Man (Capcom)	2
3 Quiz (Nahanikon)	26
4 Viper Phase 2 (Seibu)	19
5 Puzzle Bobble (Taito)	7
6 Street Fighter Zero (Capcom)	19
7 Space Invader 2 (Taito)	7
8 Stake Winner (SNK)	5
9 Pang 3 (Mitchell)	22
10 Striker 1945 (Psikyo)	15

Top five dedicated arcade games	
1 Rave Racer (Namco)	5
2 Virtua Striker (Sega)	11
3 Daytona USA (Sega)	59
4 Virtua Cop (Sega)	44
5 Cyber Cycle (Namco)	18

Another popular genre at the moment, alongside the battle arena beat 'em up, is the *Operation Wolf*-style blaster. With *Virtua Cop 1* and *2*, and *Time Crisis* due for imminent release, Konami have jumped on the bandwagon with *Crypt Killers*.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this disappointing game is its large screen which allows three players to join in at once. Each player holds a shotgun which takes eight cartridges and can be re-loaded using a pump action. The player can also choose the order in which to compete the stages, so the game is less linear than the *V-Cop* series There are also areas where one or two disparate routes can be selected (as in *Rail Chase 2*), again, making the game much less forcibly structured than its rivals.



Egyptian style characters (above) give the game an Indiana Jones look



Crypt Killers tries to repeat the successful *Op Wolf* and *V-Cop* formula, but sadly misses the target

However, the title is severely let down by its graphics. Whereas most of the backgrounds make use of polygons, many enemies are bitmapped, which looks rather primitive when placed against the visual excesses of *Virtua Cop*. This problem is not helped by the game's drab colour palette.

Perhaps as a consequence of these visual let-downs, the game has had a luke-warm reception in Japan. Konami may learn then, that producing a game to fit an in-vogue genre is not necessarily a recipe for success.

Resident **Evil**

Capcom's schlock horror offering has all the trappings of a masterpiece and Virgin is bringing it to the UK

Zombies have to be shot several times, but this only temporarily halts them. The most effective disposal method is crushing their skulls

Format:	**PlayStation**
Publisher:	**Capcom**
Developer:	**In-house**
Release date:	**Feb '96 (Jap)** **Mar '96 (UK)**
Origin:	**Japan**

For the last two years, Capcom have been floundering in a market moving more and more toward the next generation of consoles. A string of mediocre coin-op conversions for the SNES have failed to make an impression and, although their conversion of *Street Fighter* to the 3DO went some way toward stopping the rot, they need a decent, new title to complete that difficult transition from 16 to 32bit.

Resident Evil, the US and UK name for *Biohazard* (see **Edge** 26), not only represents a massive change in direction for the company, but also a promise of improved fortunes. Although the version **Edge** has played is an early Press edition, only 40% complete, the game already looks stunningly engrossing.

Resident Evil is an arcade adventure employing realtime polygon characters placed over beautifully designed pre-rendered backgrounds. The player can choose to take on the role of either Chris or Lucy, both





Here the hero is attacked by killer wasps, but they can be splatted on the floor

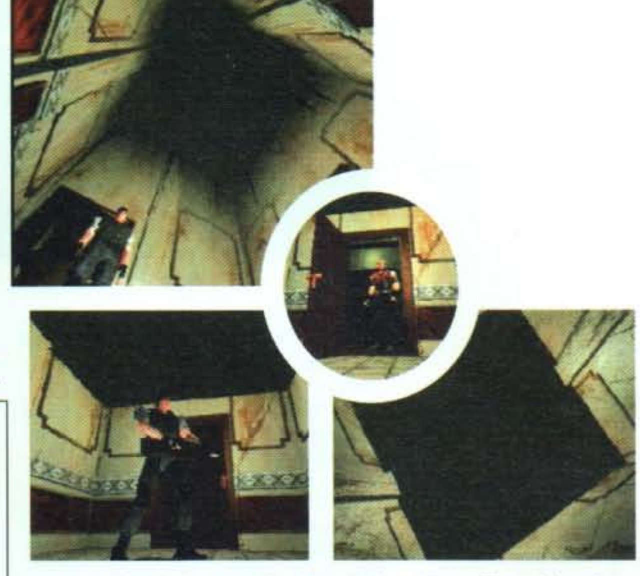


Menacingly the ravens sit silent above the corridors, watching the player roam the mansion in search of clues...

...however, if you shoot one they attack in Hitchcockian tradition. The animation on these birds is phenomenal



The most elaborate trap in *Resident Evil* is this 'crushing ceiling' scenario. Enter the room and things seem fine. Once a rifle has been collected is the trap set and waiting...



...on returning to the room the doors lock and the ceiling ominously lowers. Only if your friend smashes the door down will you be saved



The game starts with three STARS members entering the mansion. Be prepared for some classic B-movie lines

members of STARS (Special Tactics and Rescue Services): a crack squad assigned to investigate an abandoned mansion where government scientists have been carrying out secret and, frankly, ill-advised bio-technology experiments. Contact with the scientists has been lost and now the mansion is full of brain dead zombies with a quenchless appetite for human flesh. The basic plot is that the player must explore the mansion and find out what has happened, although, cleverly, the specifics of the story depend on which character has been chosen.

The scenery in *Resident Evil* is truly amazing with plenty of incredibly realistic and detailed locations. There are some wonderfully gory effects, too – the player can shoot great chunks out of zombie aggressors and when they're down, you don't just kick them, you stamp on their heads until they explode like over-ripe water melons –



Collecting extra weapons has good and bad sides. Advantageously, more weaponry means more ammo, but by collecting them traps may be activated

The player can shoot great chunks out of zombie aggressors and when they're down you stamp on their heads





One of *Resident Evil*'s many revolting scenes is this decapitation. After being attacked by a clawed monster (top), our luckless hero is butchered by the beast who rips off his head. Blood spurts everywhere

Continued next page

Continued



it'll give the tabloids a whole month's worth of 'keep this filth away from our children' features. On the subject of undead creatures, zombies aren't the only things the player must face. Giant spiders, vicious crows and huge serpents are also present to make the mission more difficult.

To help you cope with those unexpected attacks, the mansion is littered with useful things to pick up including a bounty of weapons (shotguns, chainsaws, knives and axes) and some useful equipment (maps, torches, etc).

The key word to describe *Resident Evil* is cinematic – there's a shock behind every door, a monster around every corner, and the music (very reminiscent of Angelo Bennedetti's Twin Peaks score) is essentially a highly effective suspense film soundtrack. Added to this, most locations are viewed from distorted camera angles which lend an expressionistic look to each scene and accentuate the horror movie/Romero-esque feel of the game. The effect is a genuinely tense, foreboding atmosphere in which unexpected zombie attacks can make even the most detached videogames player jump out of their seat.

So far it appears that almost everything in the game is going right. The animation is a little wooden and jerky at the moment, but hopefully the fluidity of motion in the finished game will match the quality of the backgrounds. In terms of gameplay, this early version of *Resident Evil* is rather sparse – however, Virgin have assured **Edge** that the mansion will be riddled with tricks and traps which means loads of puzzles to solve as well as undead creatures to kill. Exactly how tough these puzzles will be has not been ascertained. Hopefully, the game will not be over-simplified to best meet Japanese tastes.

Whatever superlative-laden phrases are used in the future to describe this game, 'startlingly original' won't be amongst them. This is very much *Alone in the Dark* territory: eerie music, marauding zombies, hideous beasties, etc. However, as many previous titles have shown, the arcade adventure genre is not an easy one to master. If Capcom get this game right, they'll have a massive hit on their hands. From the evidence received so far, it looks as though there will be smiles on the faces of Capcom executives early next year. **E**



***Resident Evil* promises stunning visuals married with an overdose of bloody scenes. Will Sony be swayed to tone down the gore, though?**

There's a shock behind every door, a monster around ever corner, and the music is essentially a highly effective suspense film soundtrack





The first real monster to be encountered is this giant spider. The creature crawls slowly across the ceiling, then drops down to attack



This shocking red blood could be changed for green, zombie-like ooze. *Resident Evil* is not for the squeamish. Blowing zombies' heads away is a common activity (right)







The player controls one of two characters and the game's plot alters appropriately. Also, each character has their own zombie killing move – Chris stamps on heads whereas Lucy kicks them across the room. Both actions are nice and gory

Secret of Mana 2

For many, *Secret of Mana* was the RPG equivalent of Lord of the Rings. Can *Mana 2* improve on one of the SNES's greatest hits?







Whereas the rest of the industry seems only interested in rendered 3D work, Square's continued support of traditional 2D artwork bears fruit in *Secret of Mana*'s sumptuous scenery. These beautiful backgrounds are in some ways a tribute to the graphical skills of yesteryear's artists, when state-of-the-art SGI machines were unheard of







***Mana 2* retains the famous *Mana* ring menu system. A treasure chest will reveal a roulette ring as its prize**

Format:	**SFC**
Publisher:	**SquareSoft**
Developer:	**In-house**
Release date:	**Out now**
Origin:	**Japan**

The original *Secret of Mana* has so far sold more than half a million copies in America alone. In the process it gave the role-playing genre a much-needed kick start, elevating it into the fastest growing game style in the West, making it the subject of one of the most vocal newsgroups on the internet and paving the way for more traditional RPGs like *Final Fantasy*.

When you look back over previous Square games and their amazing graphical advances, it's hard to imagine how their artists could have squeezed anything more from the humble SNES, but *Seiken Densetsu 3* (the Japanese title for the game) manages to push that boundary just a little bit further. There's no use of Silicon Graphics wizardry but the riot of colour and detail still puts just about every other recent 32bit RPG to shame. A conscious decision by Square to avoid using harsh blacks for outlines pays off handsomely. Music, too, stretches the SNES to its limits. Although many of the the tunes and





The 'neo-motion battle' that Square are so proud of can sometimes seem to be just a free-for-all as the computer-controlled characters lash out at anything within striking distance. *Virtua Fighter* it is not




One thing that is dramatically improved in *Secret of Mana 2* are the huge bosses. The first one you encounter, a giant crab, jumps effortlessly around the screen and is superbly animated

There's no use of SG wizardry but the riot of colour and detail puts just about every other recent 32bit RPG to shame

instruments remain the same, lending a nice feel of continuity for fans, the game's composer Hiroki Kikuta has pushed for a hi-fi quality soundtrack with crystal-clear pianos and a deep bass that just begs to be routed through a proper system.

But while eye and ear candy may be all very well, there were some definite flaws in *Seiken 2* (aka the original *Mana*) that needed to be addressed in the sequel. The simultaneous three-player environment may have been revolutionary but in practice it proved decidedly annoying. This sort of game doesn't really lend itself to a multi-player mode. Even worse, in one-player mode the computer-controlled characters constantly slowed the game to a crawl, especially when they ran up against bits of scenery and were promptly stymied.

Thankfully, *Seiken 3* gets around that problem by the simple expedient of making the player's character able to move freely no matter where the others are. Should anyone be lost off-screen, standing still for a few seconds sees them join the party again. Unfortunately there is no such improvement in another of *Mana*'s old bugbears – the combat system. While Square claim their new 'neo-motion battle' system represents a huge advance in fight mechanics, little seems to have changed. The computer controlled characters don't display any real tactics in combat, just a greater resilience to damage. Their inability to respond to depleted hit-points by healing themselves means that, as in the original, it's all too easy to end a battle only to find all the computer-controlled characters slaughtered.

These 'problems' have recently been the cause of what has become a minor war between Western *Mana* fans and SquareSoft USA. Because of so-called programming faults that Square consider would be impossible to fix during process, *Secret Of Mana 2* has effectively had it's American release cancelled. This has angered many more fanatical fans who blindly see it more as a case of sour grapes by SquareSoft USA because their own project, *Secret Of Evermore*, wasn't as well received as they'd hoped.

Programming bugs or no, overall, this is yet another gem in Square's ever increasing portfolio of hits. Edge's only real concern is over the game's subject matter itself. Just how long can the company keep the magic and monsters fantasy formula fresh? True, *Seiken Densetsu 3* boasts multiple storylines, not to mention huge baddy bosses in the best arcade tradition, but it'd still be nice to see these developments married to a different scenario once in a while. If SquareSoft were to convert famed RPG *Shadowrun* – now that would be cause for celebration.




Harking back to the previous game, one of the heroes rescues *Mana 2*'s equivalent of the sprite child from a perilous drop. A bit later in the game your mana spirit helps with an otherwise impassable gap






Making your way around the huge Mana world is made easier by frequent save point statues and handy methods of transport like the sailing ship. This time around there are two maps by which to navigate



Instead...

While fans argue amongst themselves about not getting every Japanese game translated, the US arm of SquareSoft are trying to smooth the troubled waters by giving the West its own version of the magic Square formula in Secret Of Evermore. Taking what is essentially the game engine from Secret Of Mana they've crafted a tale based around old B-movies, a boy, his dog and a professor trapped in his own virtual world.

Although maybe concentrating a little too much on maze and puzzle solving and lacking the finer points of Japanese design and character sensibilities, Evermore is still a decent (if slightly uninspiring) beginning that bodes well for further projects designed for Western audiences

Scorcher



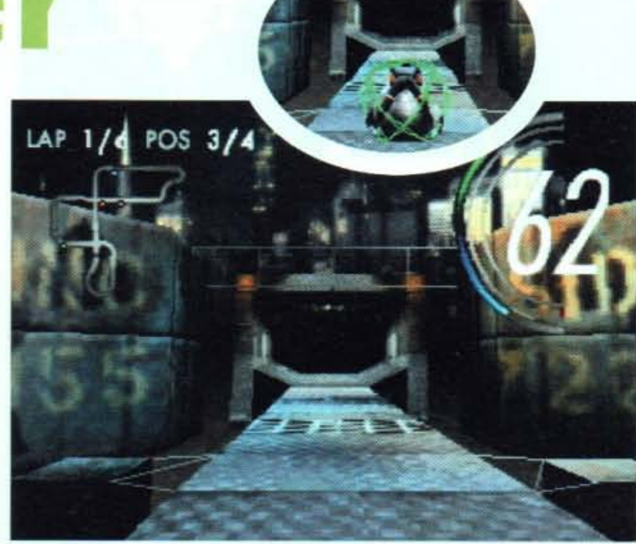




The casual stills shown here may depict a game of graphical beauty, but they still fail to do justice to the wonderful job the Zyrinx team have done when making the tracks and graphics

Scavenger's attempt to shatter the 3D racing game cliché twists the formula, quite literally, into a manic chase along tunnels and down spiralling pipes...

Format:	**Saturn**
Publisher:	**Scavenger**
Developer:	**Zyrinx**
Release date:	**TBA**
Origin:	**US**



***Scorcher* accommodates two play modes, outside (right) and an in-car view (above). This second perspective immerses the player right in the game, although things do become confusing**



Scavenger's first entry into the racing game genre deviates from the standard format in a number of ways. Most importantly, the player races around a network of valleys interspersed with tubes, bridges, obstacles and deadly pits. The skill of the game lies in avoiding these hazards, rather than the ability to negotiate tricky corners.

In essence, therefore, this early *Scorcher* demo has little more gameplay than the bonus level in *Sonic 2*, where Sonic and Tails raced each other down a tube, avoiding the mines and collecting the rings. However, what gives *Scorcher* credit is its astonishing 3D graphics. Boasting light source shading, depth fading and simulated ray tracing, the 3D engine is so impressive Sega are even shipping a demo to third party developers to convince them of the Saturn's power.



On level two the bikes have to race past stationary lorries. The misty sky also scrolls past in translucent parallax

By far the most impressive feature is the use of depth fading to cleverly camouflage any distance clipping. Sections of road and piping appear silhouetted against the apocalyptic skyline, slowly fading into view as they become more integral to the display. This all runs at a smooth 30fps.

But graphics are only half a game, and *Scorcher* needs a lot more work to bring the gameplay on par with the visuals. Because of the plunging tunnels encountered throughout the course, the vehicle is often sucked along with the player having only minimal control. Furthermore, the obstacles require precision timing to avoid them and racing around the track can therefore prove frustrating.

With a little more work on the gameplay, *Scorcher* could evolve into a phenomenal first entry for Saturn newcomers, Scavenger. If not, it will just remain a magnificent demonstration of the Saturn's graphical capabilities. E

The 3D is so impressive Sega are even shipping a demo to third party developers to convince them of the Saturn's power

Amok

Scavenger cements its reputation for developing stunning 3D games with this latest underwater blaster...



Amok's 3D engine produces some of the most stunning, atmospheric graphics yet seen on the Saturn. The murky waters provide a sea-like environment and enable convincing clipping and a high frame rate

Format:	**Saturn**
Publisher:	**Scavenger**
Developer:	**Lemon**
Release date:	**TBA**
Origin:	**US**

Following Scavenger's reputation for graphically incredible products (see Techview, page 22), it's no surprise that *Amok* is yet another frenzy of visual craftsmanship.

The game involves a series of underwater missions in which the player's sub has to infiltrate an enemy compound. It's all familiar territory but *Amok*'s phenomenal graphics ensure this is no ordinary blaster – this looks more like footage from James Cameron's The Abyss.

Employing Scavenger's AM3-beating 3D routines, *Amok* employs 'true 3D' collision detection, detecting hits between objects, surfaces, walls, enemies etc. The Scavenger team spent a whole year developing this technology.

The game does need work, though. The controls, although versatile when searching, infrequently enable the sub to escape an onslaught from four or five sharks, and if the vehicle is fired upon with missiles, survival is rare.

But the game engine does offer fantastic possibilities. If the coders distanced themselves from hectic blasting and, say, introduced some levels involving manic chases through caverns and tunnels, *Amok* could be yet another example of the Saturn's shrouded potential.





The enemies in *Amok* fit snugly into the background scenery. Sharks are particularly dangerous when enraged





Amok employs an odd display, especially noticeable during explosions, that stipples the graphics. This quirk does not affect gameplay, though

Big Red Racing

The racing game genre has seen a plethora of *Ridge Racer* clones. Enter *Big Red Racing*, a non-stop, wild and wacky roller coaster ride across some seriously deranged circuits. **Edge** rolls with it





Big Red Racing **provides high-speed thrills that stretch the traditional racing game laws to their limits. Expect manic, Wacky Races-like chases across rivers and dirt tracks. The potential for megajumps is massive (right)**

Format:	**PC**
Publisher:	**Domark**
Developer:	**The Big Red Software Co**
Release date:	**December**
Origin:	**UK**





Big Red Racing **has a truly distinctive graphic style. Gone are clichéd races through high-rise cities. Instead, jeeps, powerboats and even snowploughs compete across a variety of unusual, original landscapes**

In recent months, the racing genre has become a victim of its own success. Escalating competition has meant nearly all the latest releases – *Daytona USA, Ridge Racer, Screamer*, etc – have been virtually interchangeable in terms of appearance, with high-speed thrills, model cars and neon-lit cityscapes. *Big Red Racing* aims to buck the trend with a game that seems closer to *Mario Kart* than Le Mans.

The 12 vehicles on offer include space buggies, snowploughs and powerboats, while the 3D realtime environment lends a cartoonish feel. Cars bounce skyward and speedboats leave the river to cross sandy wastelands. There are 18 tracks available in six distinct styles: water, city, dirt, snow, quarry and even racing on other planets (complete with appropriately futuristic vehicles).

Irreverence apart, however, *Big Red* boasts the now mandatory features of a PC driving game. An abundance of multi-player features include a split-screen, one-on-one option, while up to six players can link over a network. It is also possible to play via modems and serial leads.

With more and more coin-op clones clogging up the PC production line, *Big Red Racing* will hopefully serve as a reminder that there is more to the racing genre than the slick but stultifying offerings in vogue at the moment.





Ricocheting off a steep ridge (top). Racing over a hill produces some massive jumps (above)

Stahlfeder

The vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up seems to be enjoying an almost cryogenic-like immortality. The latest 32bit blaster is a visual orgy of effects







***Stahlfeder* tries to add some spice to the hackneyed shoot 'em genre by including interactive scenery that impedes your progress, and some lovely texture-mapped 3D enemies. These features may sound more familiar, however – four planes to fly with, bombs, power-ups and shields. Hmm...**

Format:	**PlayStation**
Publisher:	**Santos**
Developer:	**In-house**
Release date:	**15 Dec (Jap)**
Origin:	**Japan**

The vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up has long been a videogame cliché. Big power-ups, predictable waves of aliens and overused formulae often mean new releases are virtually indistinguishable.

However, the Saturn and PlayStation seem to be attracting developers keen to inject some energy into the genre. *Stahlfeder,* from newcomers Santos, follows the same old routine of bombs, power-ups and end-of-level bosses, but this time the PlayStation's graphics capabilities have been used to add depth to the gameplay and visuals.

Firstly, the backgrounds take full advantage of the PlayStation's colour palette, including detailed texture and lighting effects. Not only does the scenery look gorgeous, however, but it also plays an integral part in the game, with factories and windpumps







As with most vertical scrollers these days, *Stahlfeder* enables the player to fully destroy practically all of the landscape. Trees burn, grass gets scorched and buildings explode, all at the whim of an over-excited trigger finger. There's little original about *Stahlfeder*, but it's all executed well







In some areas, *Stahlfeder* looks remarkably similar to other vertical scrollers like *Raiden*, but the use of the PlayStation's 3D capabilities will hopefully produce an original title rather than a re-hashed formula

Not only does the scenery look gorgeous, it also plays an integral part in the game, with factories and windpumps interfering with the player's blasting

interfering with the player's blasting. All this background activity is packed with beautiful animation and is further proof of the PlayStation's sprite handling: gigantic ground installations grind open and spew bullets, enemy aircraft fly overhead before diving into the play area and some craft perform magnificent loops, diving to the ground and then returning to fight on. These spectacular moves require sprite rotation and scaling, yet there is little, if any, pixellation. Further, most of the end of level bosses are 3D polygon creations rendered on the fly. By comparison, even Seibu's manic *Raiden II* looks dreadfully flat.

There are some drawbacks, however. There is no two-player option and **Edge**'s development disc only had four levels to try. Having said that, *Stahlfeder* promises to be another spectacular game to add to the PlayStation's ever-growing list of quality titles. **E**





The end-of-level bosses are constructed from polygons, rather than massive bitmapped sprites, allowing for some impressive visuals

Samurai Spirits RPG

Neo Geo owners have long been crying out for more than just a staple diet of beat 'em ups. SNK enters the lucrative RPG scene



Samurai Spirits RPG **boasts a whole CD's worth of graphics. However, with the Neo Geo's antiquated single-speed drive will this equate to galling delays?**

The Neo Geo is in desperate need of a title with RPG longevity



Of the six characters available, most appear in the *Samurai Shodown* beat 'em ups

Format:	**Neo Geo CD**
Publisher:	**SNK**
Developer:	**In-house**
Release date:	**Spring 96**
Origin:	**Japan**

Although the beat 'em up genre, at which the Neo Geo excels, is popular, the dominant genre in Japan is the *Zelda*-style RPG, and Neo Geo owners have waited years for an equivalent title to appear on their machine. Consequently, SNK have reached a compromise: *Samurai Spirits RPG* is an RPG, but it includes characters from the *Samurai Shodown* beat 'em ups.

Two game styles can be adopted: 'pure fighting', with 100% control in combat or 'traditional RPG', where fights are 'semi-active' and stats probability affects the outcome.

Of the six characters available, most are cameo roles from the *Samurai Shodown* series. Non-player characters can also be chosen to follow the leader, and they can be exchanged throughout the game according to the demands of each particular situation. There are three different game scenarios, each including a different ending and boss character. At the moment, only two of these are known: South America will feature Mijiki and Europe has a boss named Ambrosia.

The Neo Geo is in desperate need of a title with RPG longevity. However, the machine's archaic single-speed CD drive, combined with the game's size (SNK boast the machine's RAM will be crammed), could mean there will be a lengthy delay between sections. Prepare for hours spent watching the scintillating loading screen.



Combat is either based around fighters' statistics, or familiar turn-based battles

Street Fighter Alpha





***Street Fighter Alpha* adopts the graphical style of an anime comic book, yet Capcom have chosen to keep the gameplay strictly 2D**

Format:	**PlayStation (version shown) & Saturn**
Publisher:	**Capcom**
Developer:	**In-house**
Release date:	**TBA**







***SF Alpha* shuns realistic fighting moves seen in *VF2*, for example, for fantastic blows (above)**

2D or not 2D? That may have been the question on the minds of Capcom designers preparing to unleash another *Street Fighter* sequel onto a not entirely unsuspecting world. Despite the spectacular emergence of 3D into the beat 'em up domain, the success of Neo Geo titles such as *King of Fighters* and *Art of Fighting* has proved the traditional 2D approach still has a grip on the market. *Street Fighter Alpha* then, is remaining resolute to its 2D predecessors.

In the *SF* universe, the game is a prequel to *SFII*, employing fighters from the original (Adon and Birdie) as well as Guy and Sodom from *Final Fight*. From the first *SFII*, only Ryu, Ken, Chun Li and Sagat remain. There are also two newcomers: Charlie (Guile's partner) and Rose (a kind of Kung Fu crusty).

SF Alpha shows a radical departure from the old pseudo-realistic design, toward the style of *Dark Stalkers*. Characters are cartoony and exaggerated in physical dimensions, showing Capcom are willing to experiment with a series seriously threatened with formula fatigue.

Gameplay advances have also been made. The special move graphics have been updated and the power meter from *Super Street Fighter II* now has three levels. Each character has at least two super moves per level and when a move is performed, the bar only drops one level, allowing further specials to be carried out instantly. Combos and counter-moves have also been improved.

It will be interesting to see how *SF Alpha* fares against the likes of *Soul Edge* and *VF2*. The arcade version has failed to pose a threat to newer 3D fighting coin-ops such as *Tekken 2*. However, if the conversion is well implemented, it will definitely sit next to *Resident Evil* in the box marked 'Capcom revival'.





Special move fans won't be disappointed by *Street Fighter Alpha*'s range of attacks and combos. But can a game that uses traditional 2D bitmaps really compete against the versatility that 3D provides?

Dangerous games

Videogames are often in the dock accused of corrupting innocent children and creating a nation of virtual junkies. **Edge** acts for the defence

Once a new medium is popular (especially with youths), be it films, comic books, rock 'n' roll music or satellite TV, someone, somewhere, will come up with a reason to hold hearings, make threats, attempt to implement a ratings system, and (if he's a politician) jump several points in the opinion polls. So it is with video games. In the the last few years pressure groups, politicians, and the press have accused the interactive industry of everything from corrupting today's youth with images of sex and violence to causing outbreaks of epileptic seizures and the modern malaise RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury).

Of course, anyone who remembers such scaremongering eighties tomes as 'Invasion of the Space Invaders' knows such rhetoric is old-hat, aimed at games that might be sensational in the short term but with the benefit of hindsight look innocuous and quaint. Or is it really so simple? Beyond the paranoid hype, beyond the fears of concerned parents, are there genuine issues involved?

Epilepsy

Claims that videogames can trigger epileptic fits first surfaced in the early '80s,

Videogame violence

but it wasn't until 1993, when the Sun reported a boy had choked to death on his own vomit following an attack precipitated by a Nintendo game, that the panic began. A flurry of similar incidents, none as serious, were quickly picked up by the international media. Before long both Sega and Nintendo games had epilepsy warnings in game manuals, though some would argue the symptoms listed (loss of awareness, dizziness) are as indicative of a moderately involved gaming experience as of an oncoming seizure. Today, epilepsy warnings appear in game manuals on all computer systems.

Since the dawn of videogaming, there have been 50 cases of videogame-related seizures (VGRS) reported in medical literature. The actual number of incidents is probably substantially higher. A comprehensive study of the problem, published in 1994 in US journal Pediatrics, concluded that playing videogames did not cause seizures in people not already predisposed to an epileptic condition. About half of the affected individuals had abnormal Electro Encephalo Graph (EEG) readings when lights were flashed in their eyes (about 5% of the general epileptic population also display abnormal EEGs when exposed to flashing lights).

Later in 1994, a study published in The Lancet found similar results and noted that the flicker pattern of a TV most likely to cause seizures became more noticeable nearer the screen. So, if someone has seizures because of a sensitivity to light, sitting near the TV is not a good idea. Flickering sprites, caused by an overloaded sprite engine, can also increase the likelihood of a VGRS in those susceptible. Also noted was that seizures in people with extreme photosensitivity could be triggered by exposure to regular TV images and striped patterns like venetian blinds.

Of the millions of children and adults who have played videogames, only an extremely small percentage (.05%) will ever experience any problems of an epileptic nature. And only a few who experience problems will have the most adverse reaction – a full 'grand mal' seizure. Staying well back from the screen (about 10 feet) can decrease the chances of a problem, and in people with an already noted condition, purchasing a special 100 Hz TV, or wearing sunglasses while playing, can further decrease any risk.

Repetitive **Strain** Injuries

Repetitive Strain Injuries, or RSI, are a condition resulting from (as the name implies) the cumulative effect of repeated strain on one group of muscles and ligaments. Almost any activity that puts strain on or uses the wrist, from squash to bowling, sewing, driving, typing, and of course, playing videogames, can eventually build up the muscles and ligaments in the wrist enough to cause Carpel Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), a disabling condition resulting from overuse of the muscles in the hand. As these muscles thicken pressure is placed on the nerve running through the wrist, causing immense pain and even partial paralysis.

The Sun reported a boy had choked to death on his own vomit and the panic began

The most frequent sufferers are people who put in long hours typing at a computer keyboard every day, for months at a time. The main factors of a CTS flare-up seem to be determined by gender and repetition of the activity. Women, particularly pregnant women, and those from ages 30 to 60, have a higher risk than men, because hormonal changes can exacerbate a slight condition. CTS, like other RSIs, depends on frequent, intense activity. Professional sign language interpreters, for example, are another group who suffer.





Mortal Kombat 3 **(left),** ***Doom*** **(middle) and** ***Primal Rage*** **(right) portray a fantasy world where losers die in a pool of their own still-warm blood and winners are almost immortal. Healthy?**

Although no scientific studies have been done that specifically relate to videogames and RSI, there's no reason to think that videogames, which do involve use of the hands extensively, are exempt. Preventing videogame-induced RSI is as simple as taking frequent breaks from playing and not overdoing it.

The symptoms of RSI are a numbness or weakness in the hands, tingling, pain in the joints, a weakening grip and impaired finger movements. RSIs are a risk (albeit a

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small one, for those who play games for less than 40 hours a week or so) but a few simple steps can lessen the danger. Take breaks, about five to ten minutes every hour; play videogames in moderation, adults always supervising children; and pay attention to body signals, that is, in the event of pain, stop playing.

Other **symptoms**

There are a litany of other complaints attributed to videogames, for which there is little scientific data, but a wealth of anecdotal evidence. Foremost are complaints of eye strain from playing both arcade and home videogames. Informal testing at the **Edge** office revealed blink rates per minute dropped dramatically when playing games (and to a lesser extent when using a computer). In one extreme case, blink rates dropped from 30 per minute when doing something manual, like packing a box, to two per minute while playing a 32bit racing game. Dry eyes are particularly a problem for contact lens wearers. Informal surveys conducted at arcades indicate the problem is present there as well.

As long as videogames remain exciting, there isn't much hope for a cure to this potentially painful problem. Thanks to evolution, the human eye tends not to blink when viewing motion – a smart strategy for survival on the savanna, or alternatively in *Super Bomberman II*. Our solution: cut scenes and pre-rendered intros are for blinking (there had to be a reason for them someplace). Be aware, and blink whenever the action ceases (not a problem for CD-i owners). In the end, eye strain is a polite way of the body telling its owner to take a break.

Another dilemma confronted by many videogamers is motion sickness. Just as some people get sick on roller-coasters, others can't handle the motion of *Doom* or *Descent*. Problems occur when the eyes perceive motion, but the inner ear doesn't. If you get sick when playing *Doom*, there's really only one solution: stop. Like many of the problems associated with videogaming, this is something of a nonissue. Few people tried to ban IMAX movies because they make some people ill.

Not strictly related to RSIs, which are a more serious problem, incurring a sore thumb is often the consequence from a marathon playing session with a joypad. Solution: calm down – the joypad will react with a little push as well as a big one.

A stiff neck or sore back muscles, caused from sitting in one position while playing are also common, though minor. Again, the solution is simple. When taking the break to rest your eyes (see above), stretch, take a walk, and relax.

Most of the complaints about the physical problems associated with videogames can be overcome with a modicum of common sense. But what about the possible psychological effects?







Gory videogames are not a modern fascination. Early decapitations were at the cutting edge of C64 games (*Wolfman*, left, cert 18). Nowadays, voluntary self-censorship is placed on all titles

Violence

The possible link between violent games and aggressive behaviour has been at the centre of the media's concern with the possible dangers of videogames, climaxing with the implementation of a 'voluntary' ratings system by the industry. This seemingly knee-jerk move of implementing a ratings system without any real debate served to get critics off the back of the industry without too much trouble.

However, though the issue isn't as controversial as it was, the rating system looked to many in the gaming business like an admission that there was something to the fear-mongerers' claims about the dangers of videogames, and that people were right to be concerned.

Yes, the majority of videogames have themes that involve violence or killing at some point but there is no proof that games cause any psychological harm at all. An American study by Dr. Jeanne Funk, published in the journal Clinical Pediatrics, found that among younger players (13 and 14 year olds), games involving human or fantasy violence accounted for 49% of preferred games, with sports games (which often have violent content) accounting for another 29%. Educational games accounted for a mere 2%.

Unsurprisingly, violent games are popular. As are violent movies and TV shows. Any type of news, whether on paper or TV, shows a tremendous amount

of violence. Despite some evidence that violent content on TV increases aggression in the interpersonal relationships of children, two studies conducted by Dr. Steven Silvern at Auburn University discount the theory that violent videogames result in violent patterns of behaviour. At the time one study was published, Silvern was quoted in US News & World Report as saying 'After playing [videogames], children don't necessarily feel angry; they feel aroused.'

To nonplayers, it may look as though children are sitting quietly in front of the set, playing a (possibly violent) game one minute, and bouncing off the walls the next. Has the game turned the child into a killing machine? Hardly. The key element is adrenaline. When playing a (good) game, a player's concentration is totally devoted to the action on screen. After beating a boss, or a friend in head-to-head play, there is an incredible amount of adrenaline built up, not unlike the effect of an exciting movie. An increase in physical activity immediately after playing is natural and to be expected.

Parents who worry about violent play would do well to remember how they played as children. It's unfair to point solely to videogames when children's play often involves make-believe violence.

More serious than whether children will be boisterous after playing a game is whether an endless stream of fatalities, death moves, and other various and sundry forms of killing will desensitise players to violence, making them as unconcerned about the death of a child in Bosnia as they are about one of the many deaths of Sub Zero's they might see in a day. There's no question that a violent movie like Natural Born Killers may be shocking and disgusting to see the first time, but repeated viewings will certainly remove any nauseation at seeing the violence. It's tedious to see the same kills again and again, which is why the new *Mortal Kombat III* is more popular than *Street Fighter II*. Does a desensitisation to fictional violence carry over to real life? The answer hinges on several factors.

The desensitisation of people is well documented: a war veteran or a casualty nurse will be less shocked by the sight of a bloody car wreck than an 'ordinary' person, for example. But do humans log away 'real' and 'fictional' based experiences separately? It's not clear. All children learn real-world skills by playing and from fictional stories, but do videogames teach them the wrong lessons? Perhaps they simply play an unavoidable part in a child's development. All children have a propensity to 'explore' violence, and if their desire to experience that isn't satisfied in front of a videogame, then it may manifest itself in another, less safe, environment.

There is also the point that, by virtue of videogaming's interactivity, playing violent games teaches 'cause and effect' in a way noninteractive TV or movies can never do. A regular player of *Mortal Kombat* may understand the implications of violence more than a nonplayer. The question arises, however, as to whether he or she will have learned that violence is a viable solution to everyday, real-world problems.

The graphic realism of a game is also relevant. In terms of realism videogames still pale in comparison to actual video images of violence that are seen regularly on TV. If there's a finger to be pointed when it comes to desensitisation to violence, we should look to movies and TV, not videogames. At least, not until we see fully interactive (not FMV) games like 'Virtua Torture', that are indistinguishable from TV quality images. Until then, games should be merely viewed as secondary concerns.

Are Videogames **addictive**?

Videogames are, of course, addictive, depending on what is meant by the term 'addictive'. There are few, if any, gamers who have not rushed home from work or school to play their latest game – maybe even neglecting responsibilities in the process. People talk about some games (especially puzzlers, like *Tetris*) as if they were drugs. Should we ban or regulate them like any other drug?

Hardly. Unless you also want to ban soap operas, board games, paper and dice role-playing games, good books, and almost every other leisure activity. Strictly speaking, addiction is defined as the compulsive need for and use of a habit forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol) characterised by tolerance and well-defined psychological symptoms upon withdrawal (Websters dictionary, tenth edition). So while the lure of entertainment is at its heart much the same as that of many dangerous drugs – they provide a temporary escape from the problems of the real world – they are not strictly addictive. They can, however, be habit forming and trigger compulsive behaviour.

And while the physiology of addiction to drugs like heroin or cocaine have been well documented and are clear, little is easily explained in cases of

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Videogame violence

'addiction' to TV, gambling, videogames, or any other entertainment activity.

The main difference between traditional forms of entertainment and videogames is control. As opposed to books or movies, which enable vicarious living in another world through someone else's eyes, videogames enable self-controlled exploration, and eventually enable the possibility to become the master of an entire virtual universe.

As well as providing the escapism of books and TV, videogames also provide the challenge of traditional games, appealing to humans' competitive nature, and providing a sense of accomplishment when finished. 'People have very little control in their lives today – there is less freedom than in previous generations, and

There are few gamers who have not rushed home form work or school to play the latest game

videogames provide the perfect means for a person to gain control of their life,' says Dr Margaret A. Shotton, author of Computer Addiction? A Study of Computer Dependency.

Shotton concludes that the psychological process behind male teenagers becoming 'addicted' to videogames is closely related to the prevalence of anorexia among teenage women. In both cases, the total power a person may hold over one particular element of his or her life (playing a videogame, or eating) is heinously abused.

So, for a variety of reasons, games are compelling, they can draw a player in and keep him or her interested for hours at a stretch. But a strict textbook definition of addiction requires that the addict is harmed by their dependency. Can videogames go from being a relaxing pastime to a dangerous compulsion that takes over a life, causing the neglect of family, relationships, and other responsibilities? Considering we live in a world where people hate Jeremy Beadle, the answer is, not surprisingly, yes.

'It's not so much the videogames, it's a flaw within the individual that's brought out by the availability of the games,' says Edward Looney, Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, USA, and an expert on compulsive behaviour. His group, set up to help compulsive gamblers, has in recent years received an increasing number of calls from people who are having problems with addictions to videogames, mostly arcade games. People addicted to videogames, he says 'are doing what all addicted people do, which is avoiding their real problems.'

Looney doesn't think banning or regulating games is a solution. 'Most people can do these things in a normal and healthy way,' he says. In fact, Looney has observed that taking away the addictive activity or product often just causes those suffering from addiction to switch to a 'spare tire' or backup addiction. Take away the videogames, he says, and the person may switch to a dangerous food addiction or something similar. The key, according to Looney, is to fix the underlying problem – not to treat the symptoms.

One group who can suffer from long paly without necessarily being compulsively addicted is children. 'Many kids can't define limits,' says Dr Miriam Saltmarch, professor in the Department of Food and Nutrition at San Jose State University, California. 'Like the studies of rats that keep pushing a button that triggers the pleasure centre in their brain until they die, lots of kids will play these games until you stop them.'

A degree of parental control should be exercised in this matter. 'If a person can't stop themselves, they need to have limits set for them by a parent,' argues Saltmarch. 'There are a lot of kids who can quit. And then there are the kids who crave stimulation for their brains. Kids with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), once called hyperactivity, tend to love videogames.' Saltmarch limits her child, who has ADD, to an hour a day. 'But it can be positive for a kid with ADD to play for a long time, if they're good at it. It doesn't frustrate them and it builds self-esteem.'

So, it would seem that videogame 'addiction is a symptom of a deeper problem, and not necessarily a problem in itself. The infamous American National





***Phantasmagoria* (left) and *Endorfun* (right) are two PC 'videonasties'. *Endorfun* recently received bad press for brainwashing kids (see p13)**

Rifle Association would say the same about assault weapons, however. Clearly more research is needed.

Do videogames make you **antisocial**?

David Sheff observes in his book Videogames, A Guide For Savvy Parents that whereas 'Generations of children had been imbued with Mickey [Mouse]'s message: 'We play fair and we work hard and we're in harmony' and so on, [the game] *Mario* imparted other values: Kill or be killed. Time is running out [and – perhaps most importantly] You are on your own.'

It's an interesting point. Certainly, of all the charges videogames stand accused of, this one would, at first glance, seem to have the most validity. Videogame playing can be a very solitary activity. As noted above, one of the attractions of videogames is their ability to let players escape the real world. Does this cause players to withdraw from their peers? Are videogames fundamentally antisocial?

Most people who have actually played games will adamantly say that this is not the case in the majority of situations and, in fact, the exact opposite is true – videogames are both an extremely social activity and a great social equaliser. 'As a trend, I've found that introverted people have increased their social circles through playing videogames, but I have never found that extroverted people become more withdrawn or isolated,' says Dr. Shotton. When dealing with this question, it is very important to take into account the genre of games under discussion.

Fighting games are probably the most social of all game types. They enable people to compete in a friendly challenge of skill, regardless of physical ability; in that sense, they are a great social equaliser, permitting anyone to participate. Informal surveys conducted at arcades found that the majority of players who played against the machine said it was 'boring,' and relished being able to play against other people, sometimes to the point of giving strangers money when they ran out, so that they could keep playing.

Playing an RPG or adventure game, which may seem like a textbook definition of a solitary activity, can also become a social activity if two or more people decide to play together. Even though only one person is manipulating the joystick, both people can play the game, working together to solve puzzles. Usually the nonplayer takes on the key role of mapper. Since RPGs and adventure games are less dependent on fast reaction times, all the people playing can consult on what the next move should be. This kind of game enables players to team up, and it can create camaraderie.



The PlayStation also receives its fair share of blood and guts. *Biohazard* (main) enables players to fulfil their dreams by crushing zombie heads. *Loaded* (right) is total carnage, pure and simple

In fact, **Edge** makes the contention that it isn't RPGs that can be the most solitary games, but rather shooters and platform games, which, *Sonic 2* aside, are fundamentally one-player games. Still, there are many leisure activities (like books) that are very solitary. That isn't the problem – everyone wants to spend time alone now and then, and the escape potential of videogames is well known, and in fact is one of their main attractions. The real question is, 'Does playing solitary games make you withdraw from social interaction with other humans?' And the answer seems to be a resounding no. Dr. Miriam Saltmarch has found that with many children, 'it gives a lot of these kids something to have in common with other kids. It can be an equaliser and a basis for making social connections that they otherwise couldn't make.'

Conclusion

To conclude, are videogames harmful? The risks from epileptic seizures are real, but they affect only an extremely small portion of the population. Certain addictive personalities can make a compulsion out of anything, and videogames are no exception, but for the vast majority of people, adults and children, the answer is clear: videogames are nothing more than what they appear to be – a great way to relax, and a lot of fun to play. Enjoy.




hype?

Hip or **hype**

Is the videogames industry trading a hype-fuelled agenda for a hip new image? **Edge** investigates the art of the hard sell



By the start of 1994, the videogames industry had witnessed the fastest growth in a consumer durable good ever. In three years, demand had grown by an unprecedented 3,000%, the total UK marketing budget had risen from £2 million per annum to £24 million, articles had appeared all over the national press lamenting the demise of pop music and the specialist magazine market proliferated. Inevitably, such growth was unsustainable and the boom was followed by an equally spectacular bust as both software and hardware sales reached their plateau and then experienced a dramatic fall.

The interim generation of platforms bridging the gap between the 16bit market and the current 32bit onset (CD^{32}, Sega 32X etc) have fought a valiant (and perhaps suicidal) rearguard action in the face of a shrinking marketplace, but it is the 32bit machines – and particularly the Saturn and PlayStation – that are truly attempting to reignite consumer interest. The difficulty lies in using a smaller marketing budget to sell a more expensive product to an increasingly technologically literate and media-aware populace. It's a juggling trick which has lead to some interesting solutions.

Increasingly in the late '80s, the marketing profession pioneered the concept of trickle down marketing. This technique relies on targeting the small but significant early adopter section of the population – the people with a high disposable income who are almost predisposed to pioneer the use of a new technology or product. Once this group has been ensnared, word of mouth and the chimeric 'cool factor' should lead to the product being adopted by the mass market.

It's a concept that fits in admirably with the other major change in the games companies' tactics: guerrilla marketing. This may sound like too many marketing execs have been on paintball assertiveness courses, but it is in fact a very effective marketing technique giving high exposure for minimum expenditure. It eschews traditional campaign directions such as full page ads, conventional commercials or billboards and substitutes them for, say, placing ads from an in-game character in the personal columns. At it's worst, guerrilla marketing is a cheap publicity stunt. At it's best, it can be both outrageous and witty and generates the elusive goal of a self-perpetuating media spiral.

Despite the games companies embracing this brave new dawn of marketing techniques, there is still plenty of nostalgia for the boom period of the early '90s.

'Sega's certainly spending substantially less than we did back then,' says Jeremy Crisp, Product Manager of Saturn. 'In terms of ratio I wouldn't know, I wasn't around then, but put it this way: sponsoring Formula 1 would be well out of our league now whereas back then we did it well and spent an awful lot of money on it.'

Formula 1, and Sega's sponsorship of the Williams team for the 1993 season was certainly expensive. That, though, is nothing compared to their sponsorship of just one Grand Prix, the 1993 European GP held on a rain-sodden Donington race track.

'I've seen the video of that,' says Crisp, 'and it's unbelievable. All the starters wearing Sonic costumes, Sega everywhere – that would cost millions of pounds.'

3DO's Bob Faber, however, contends that the budget is still there if it's needed. 'Throughout the industry when you needed to spend money, historically producers would

Sony TV ad, Christmas 1995





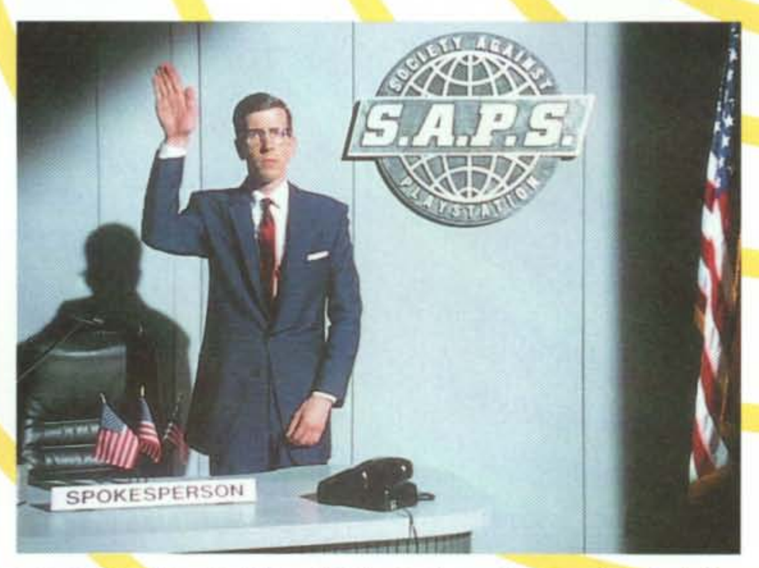








Once again Sony brings out the SAPS team to plug the PlayStation. It's Christmas, but Mum and Dad don't know what to buy the kids. Don't worry, get them 'stick' – it's versatile, it's fun, it has hundreds of uses. Whatever you do, don't waste your money on that brain-washing PlayStation, urges the SAPS man



The Society Against PlayStation (SAPS) ad is the prominent campaign adopted by Sony. The central message is 'PlayStations are bad for you'. With a SAPS spokesperson who is the antithesis of cool, the PlayStation gains street cred

Don'tplayaDodo
Play3DO



The current UK 3DO campaign may be a cheap stunt to some (see Edge 27), but 3DO Managing director Bob Faber (right) asserts the money is available if required

spend whatever they needed to to sell their products. I don't think that people said, 'Oh, I'm not going to spend any money.' I think they said, 'Here's my customer, here's the appropriate amount for me to spend and here's how I should spend it.' If you look at the marketing spend per system sold it's probably higher on the 32bit systems than it was on the 16bit systems.'

Sega's ad budget for the Saturn for the whole of Europe is expected to reach £25 million by Christmas 1996, of which it is estimated that £5 million is devoted to the UK. Whilst not exactly peanuts, it is four times less than Sony's budget, expected to top £20 million in the UK by the end of the same period. Sony, entering the marketplace for the first time, are the big players with an ad spend approaching that of the boom times. Not surprisingly this makes them bullish about their own prospects. While PlayStation Product Manager Phil Harrison acknowledges that the market has had problems, he defines them as industry-led ones instead of consumer doubts.

'We've just moved into a new cycle,' he states. 'The overall market has decreased in value but it hasn't decreased in units. There's lots of hardware still being sold of all kinds and whilst the tabloid press may not have been covering the likes of the Sega and Nintendo 16bit machines as vigorously as they were two years ago, there are still plenty of consumers out there for whom video games are a major form of entertainment.'

The core of Harrison's argument is that the nature of the games market itself has changed. That videogames have moved from being a peripheral phenomena to becoming a legitimate consumer good in their own right.

'I think two things have happened,' he says. 'One, we have moved out from the ten to 14 year-old boy market and have expanded the business to have a much broader appeal. As soon as you broaden the appeal you lessen the impact in any one age group, so it becomes a more general form of entertainment. It doesn't have the same peaks and troughs as it used to and it will be a more year-on-year steady growth as it is in music and movies. Two, I don't think video games are a phenomena anymore. They themselves are no longer new. Innovations within games are new and interesting but we don't talk about the reinvention of the cinema every two years.'

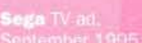
The key word at the moment seems to be 'reinvigorate'. The marketing strategies of the games companies are all aimed at pulling in those who bought 16bit consoles but have since dropped out of the market. Harrison terms them 'lapsed gamers' – people who are aware of the games market and the possible entertainment value of games, but are no longer active consumers.

The difficulty now is in reaching them, for companies to find them rather than simply letting them come to the companies. Of marketing offensively rather than defensively.

'We're now trying to speak to those people where in the past we didn't need to because the mass-market has just been grovelling for video games,' says Crisp. 'You know all the stories about *Sonic 2* coming out and selling three quarters of a million copies in a day and that kind of stuff. Things have changed now, we've got a market that's declined enormously and we've got to be a bit cleverer in the way we market our products.'

Which means for a start ditching the fast-cut, 'yoof' TV advertising as epitomised by the original Sega Pirate TV ad or the infamous Pot Noodle one. Sony's research into the 18, 19 age group showed that as soon as they sniffed the vaguest inkling of yoof marketing, as soon as they realised that they were being targeted specifically, they switched off instantly. Videogame TV executions have had to change to combat the new sophistication of their audience.

'It was a really exciting sector three years ago,' says Mike Perry,



Sega TV ad, September 1995

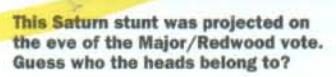








The Saturn advert forces home the message: Saturn equals speed. Fast cuts, frenetic action and surreal visuals (such as eyes being sucked out of their sockets) make the Saturn ad unusual and at times confusing. The game on display here is, of course, Daytona.

This Saturn stunt was projected on the eve of the Major/Redwood vote. Guess who the heads belong to?

continued next page

Hip or **hype**

MD of Simons Palmer, the company behind Sony's SAPS campaign. 'It was fresh, new and crazy, but now other youth advertisers are being crazy for craziness sake without any new ideas behind them. Quick cuts, crazy things happening, MTV style graphics... it's not fresh, it just becomes wallpaper. Nowadays a 15-year-old is so sophisticated – he's a hell of a lot more media literate than a 35 or 45-year-old and he sees through it immediately.'

'The advertising has to do a lot more than make a brash noise and drop its trousers, which was what it did a few years ago,' comments John Hackney, of Sega's agency McCann Erickson.

Inevitably, there's a certain amount of sabre-rattling between the two agencies over their respective campaigns, both somehow contriving to paint their opposition as making retrograde steps. Perry judges the Sega campaign to be very 'Ridley Scott '80s' while Hackney sees the core philosophy of the SAPS campaign as harping along the lines of your mother wouldn't like it. However they're judged, though, there's no doubt that they are both targeting older audiences than before.

'With the new consoles and the cost at which they're going to the market, we're targeting an older audience than we've done in the past,' says Crisp, '16 to 30-year-old men. Mega Drive advertising was designed to appeal to a younger audience. That's one of the key changes I think. Also, as the industry has matured, people have become a lot more advertising-literate. Ads have had to become more original than in the past, which glorified the gore. You've got to try and bring the standards of game advertising up to meet the standards of other industries like beer, cars etc.'

Nintendo, represented nowadays by Hampshire-based THE Games, find themselves in an odd position in the run up to Christmas. Whilst Sega can comfortably concentrate on the Saturn, THE still have to market the increasingly outdated SNES in order to tap into the seasonal consumer spend. Luckily they have two big releases to exploit, *Donkey Kong II* and *Killer Instinct*, both from Rare.

THE's Alexander Fitzgibbons forecasts that both games will command a total marketing budget of £1 million plus, equal to the amount spent on the groundbreaking *Mortal Kombat* campaign two years ago. The idea is to sell these games and reinforce brand loyalty during the wait for their own next generation machine.

'We're not pussying away from going into the market and spending some money,' says Fitzgibbons, 'but having said that we're being very tight about where we spend our money. We're not just going to throw money at a product launch without really knowing exactly where it's going to go and having a good idea exactly who, how and where we're going to market that product to.'

The 'who' is intriguing. 'There's been a lot of aiming these 32bit consoles at the 18 to 25 market,' he continues, 'and I think that's slightly mistaken. You'll see us aiming at the same market that we had before, 12 to 18. Now you can aim a product at a 15-year-old and in many ways that can still be aimed at a 22-year-old as well. The markets aren't so strictly defined.'

Fitzgibbons coyly hints at some Ultra 64 teasers hitting print or screen around the Christmas period. Rigidly defined or not, in the new marketing topography TV advertising is increasingly becoming the second stage of a campaign.

'We were the first ones to say – and people ridiculed us when we said this last year – that high profile TV advertising is not the way to reach the customer for these products,' comments Faber. 'The customer for these products is smart, they are well-informed, they are technology literate and they are very interested in the products so you need guerrilla tactics to break through the clutter that's in their everyday lives and get right at the customer you want to buy the product. Now everybody's doing it.'

Faber dismisses TV advertising as a true massmarket tactic and intriguingly goes on to add that the 3DO is not a massmarket product. For Sega and Sony, who are trying to get their systems to become one, the groundwork – the recruitment of the crucial early-adopters – happens way before the campaign goes to the mass market. Even when it does, though, companies are being far more selective with their media buying than before. Conventional marketing is now being used in unorthodox ways.

Jeremy Crisp: 'Certainly we're doing a TV ad and we've had a 60 second cinema ad running for three months now, and in those ways they are conventional forms of advertising. However you'll find that you'll only see our cinema ad in the first week of a film running. We want the guys who went to see Pulp Fiction or Braveheart in the first week, we don't want the people – at this early stage – who went to see it

Sega US TV ad, July 1995








The US Saturn campaign features coneheads, aliens from the planet Saturn, subjected to rendered graphics created by the Saturn. The experience is so awesome mouths gape open and dribble streams of saliva. The experiment was a success



The US PlayStation campaign has so far been dire. Having ditched its daft 'Polygon Man' mascot (surely the antithesis of PlayStation's abilities), recent ads (above) are equally tacky





Virgin's campaign for *Command and Conquer* presented the passer-by with a bill-board full of historical dictators. The ASA demanded the ad was changed to hide Jacques Chirac, since it portrayed him as a tyrant

in the third and fourth week. So if you're doing conventional creative work try and be unconventional in your media buying.'

Trickle down, catching the image-leaders, has been the key to the launch of the 32bit machines into the wider public's awareness.

'It's an interesting concept this early-adopter marketing tactic and marketing ideas,' says Crisp. 'In the drinks industry trying to get early adopters is quite easy. You get your product in the right pubs which might only be 200 or 300 key bars in the whole country. If they're in there, then the people in those bars will enjoy them and tell their friends and all of a sudden you've got Absolut vodka or you've got Sol lager – two classic examples of trickle-down marketing.'

Crisp goes on to say that he thinks the games industry is too young to have experienced trickle down effects just yet. However, that hasn't deterred Sony. The Saturn may have come to the market with the Sega brand name firmly to the fore (Crisp's admittedly biased viewpoint being that the name has a built in 'street-cred image') but Sony were starting from scratch.

'We wanted to establish PlayStation as a credible product first so we used some sponsorship and viral marketing to achieve that,' says Harrison, 'to get it out there and expose people to the graphics and the games. Get them, the influencer and the group leader, talking about it. Every peer group, be it playground or workplace, has a group leader, someone who's more informed than the others. If we can reach him or her and have that person start talking about the PlayStation in positive ways, that has a wildfire effect of spreading around your target audience.'

Sony's pre-launch activities were a classic example of trickle down. The company paid for a presence at the 15th birthday celebrations of influential style magazine The Face and were also present at competitor Ikon's launch. It has a permanent room at the hipper-than-thou London club Ministry Of Sound and there is even a machine lurking backstage in the green room by the Top Of The Pops studio. Special T-shirts were commissioned from designers Antoni and Alison and then handed out to celebrities, reportedly gracing famous bodies appearing in TV locations as diverse as Newsnight and The Big Breakfast . Even PlayStation-branded roaches were to be had at the Glastonbury Festival earlier this year.

Even PlayStation-branded roaches were to be had at the Glastonbury Festival this year

On this point, Harrison is very careful: 'We had some postcards with a serrated design on them. I don't know what they were used for,' he said, speaking corporately. 'God forbid that they got used for drug paraphernalia.'

Hmm, quite. Still, roaches, postcards or whatever, the idea is to create a frisson. At this stage of the campaign the company aren't so much trying to sell a consumer durable, they're trying to convert that £300 box of electronics into a lifestyle choice. Convince a journalist of a magazine like The Face that you have a cool product, and they in turn pass on the information to about 100,000 other people.

'Chronology is the most important thing,' says Harrison. 'We wanted to reach the early-adopter first. If you reach them first you can comfortably go to the mass market second. It's impossible to do that the other way round because the early-adopter will reject anything that is already a mass market item.'

Jeremy Crisp: 'We're trying to appeal to early-adopters' knowledge of the marketing world by trying to be clever and innovative and different; making the idea of the ad stick in their mind rather than bombarding them with hundreds and hundreds of messages.'

Actually

getting your message to stand out from that background noise is the supreme challenge of marketing. It's especially relevant to the next gen consoles which are, as Harrison stated in **Edge** 26, 'fighting for the same £300 that could be spent on a mountain bike, a stereo or a couple of pairs of designer trainers.'

Hence guerrilla marketing; squeezing the largest amount of publicity out of the smallest budget. It's not the only technique for generating the maximum exposure for the minimum outlay (Nintendo's sponsorship of a five day music event gives them two hours of primetime exposure on the Christmas TV schedules for less than three full page ads in The Sun) but it can be the most spectacular.

Along those lines Sony will extend the SAPS concept to include





1993: Nintendo's Rik Mayall campaign and Sega's Pirate TV concept would now be considered too youth-orientated

stickering tube trains and possible demonstrations outside stores selling PlayStation. Probably the best example though, and certainly the one that illustrates the advantages of quick reactions to topical events, was Sega's stunt on the eve of the Tory leadership challenge this summer. From a boat on the Thames, a huge blow-up of *Virtua Fighter* was projected on to the House Of Commons with the heads of John Major and John Redwood

Continued next page

Hip or hype

grafted to the polygonal figures. The text around the figures simply stated 'Sega Saturn comes out fighting'.

'One of the benefits of Sega is that we're very quick to get our marketing into what's going on out there, making it contemporary and interesting to people,' says Crisp. 'If an opportunity comes up we can act on it very quickly.' As opposed to a lot of big, ponderous companies who waste a few weeks waiting for red ink go-aheads from marketing directors and boards, he says.

'We use that as an advantage over our competitors and try to exploit the fact that we can do it and they can't. As a marketing tool I guess we'd call it guerrilla marketing. Of course, when we do have the money we can do traditional marketing activities as well."

While Crisp declined to comment on (and indeed denied responsibility for) the vaguely illegal Thames escapade, he did detail some of the thinking behind various aspects of their print advertising.



PlayStations even appeared in the green room of Top of the Pops, here being played by Damon of Blur



Sony sponsored The Face's 1995 club guide, and even distributed 'drug paraphernalia' at Glastonbury (top)

'One of the things we try and do, because we have less money, is that when we buy advertising space in a magazine we don't buy your traditional one page or half page ad, we try and incorporate it into part of the magazine; seeing that the strap line sits in with the attitude of the magazine or is part of the copy. For *Bug* in Select this month we've got six stills of *Bug* in the personal ads page and we've also taken out two personal ads that *Bug* wrote in. [We do] these kind of things because they're clever and people remember them as opposed to your traditional ads which people become numb to if they're reading a 300 page magazine with 100 ads.'

One of the key aspects of this form of advertising is originality. 'One of our *Bug* executions is a close-up of *Bug* and his massive big eyes. We've closed-up to that really tightly so it looks like a pair of breasts. Above it you've got 'Hello Boys'. It's not a Wonderbra comparison, we're not going to be putting it beside any Wonderbra ads like Kaliber did, probably because it's been done before and it wouldn't be in our benefit to do things that have already been done.'

The real question, though, is whether the market can expand again to the dimensions it reached in late 93. Harrison might view it as a cyclical environment with Sony leading the charge back up the upwards curve but all the sharp marketing tactics being employed will be worthless if the consumer remains unwilling, or perhaps unable, to pay for the goods.

Crisp is evasive whilst Fitzgibbons points to the wider economic indicators: 'I think with the launch of the Saturn and the PlayStation and, hopefully the Ultra 64 in April, the market will pick up again. What people tend to forget is that the country has been in deep recession for the past few years which will inevitably affect what people spend their money on.'

He goes on to cheerfully forecast that the worst of the recession is now over. Harrison, too, is equally optimistic: 'I think we are entering into a new growth period which will make the market even bigger,' he states simply.

Faber also sees the market growing, but dismisses the 32bit machines as a stunted product cycle destined not to run its full course before the 64bit wave hits.

'I think the next really big wave is going to be 64bit products,' he says. 'The experience is so much better but the price is similar to the 32bit systems. They're coming so quickly on the heels of the 32bit product introductions that at its peak the 32bit market will probably only be 10% of the 16bit market.'

Whichever way you look at it, once we get to this stage of the respective campaigns the competing systems and relative technical merits of the various platforms fade into the background. Even the traditional bugbear of software availability and quality takes a backseat. For the mainstream consumer, isolated from the analysis of the specialist press, what counts now more than anything is the marketing executive's skill at transforming a £300 box of electronics into a small object of desire.

3DO TV ad, April 1995

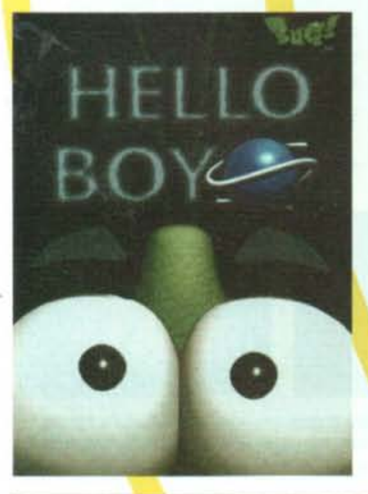








The message of this 3DO advert is simple: if you're not playing with 3DO, you're just playing with toys. Unless of course you're playing with a PlayStation or Saturn







Sega's *Bug* tactics mock the Wonderbra advert while London's cabs are also taken for a ride

Sega Saturn Campaign

McCann Erickson started their Saturn campaign with extensive market research, just as Simons Palmer did for the PlayStation.

'We took on the Sega account in preparation for the Saturn launch on a pan-European basis in March this year,' explains John Hackney, Vice President for Europe, 'and in the preparation for that and the subsequent development we did quite a lot of research over Europe into the Sega brand. One of the things we did as part of the projective techniques of the research was to ask people, 'What are Sega like? Imagine if you went into that







The Saturn ad is set within a fictional Sega test building, an idea resulting from extensive market research



building you see at the top of Cromwell Road, who would be in there and what would the people be like?'

'What came out is an image of Sega as a corporation totally dedicated to gaming. They would imagine a really eclectic mix of people inside the organisation; technicians, young people in trainers testing games, inscrutable Japanese boffins, all working night and day to perfect the best games systems. On top of that was the feeling that Sega – more than Nintendo which came across as very safe, very Disney – had a bit of a 'fuck you' attitude. They think ultimately that Sega probably doesn't like them. It tolerates young gamers and may offer them some respect if they get it right and are good.'

Hackney mentions the kind of 'playful disdain' and arrogance exhibited by people such as the late Ayrton Senna as an example of what their research dug up. It's an interesting finding, probably one whose seeds were planted back in the time when Sega's corporate icon was a hedgehog with supposed attitude and one that the agency worked hard on to turn into a finished commercial.



Market research indicated Sega is imagined as being totally dedicated to gaming – John Hackney, Vice President, McCann Erickson Europe

First though came the pre-launch campaign, rolling out slightly behind the PR blitz designed to hype the machine and let the public know Saturn was on its way.

The advertising acknowledged people already knew the Saturn was coming. 'We weren't interested in those that didn't,' says Hackney. 'We were working in tandem with this snowball effect the PR was having.' So Saturn wasn't branded, it was left for the public to work out where it was. 'We bought poster sites but in horrible locations – we didn't buy high profile sites. We were in magazines like Loaded so we were reaching a particularly discreet audience there.

'We allowed the advertising to be sufficiently cryptic so it could only be decoded by those who knew what a blue orb with an 'S' around it was.'

The actual massmarket ad campaign built on the results of the market research and was designed to blend the images that gamers apparently had running through their heads with imagery that McCann Erickson thought fitted with the games themselves. Cinematic references were used extensively, Hackney stating that a lot of the films gamers watch are along the lines of Bladerunner and Terminator, so incorporating their imagery into the ad would give it enough consistencies and commonalties to work on a European level.

Though the theme of the campaign is slightly less immediate than Sony's execution, Hackney reckons they've set a tone and an approach that can easily be followed through ensuing ads.

'There's a lot more we can do in terms of lifting the lid off this semi-imaginary, semi-real world of what Sega is all about. I've been to the AM2 development place in Japan and some of this actually exists over there. That's the whole idea for us, to build some of that imagery in and I believe we can create a labyrinthine story around what Sega has inside the darkened corners of its empire.'

Continued next page

Hip or hype

Sony PlayStation Campaign

Society Against S.A.P.S. PlayStation

Sony's SAPS campaign (Society Against PlayStation) started out, as most campaigns do, with extensive market research carried out by their agency. Simons Palmer were planning a pan-European campaign and had to come up with a strategy that could be dialled into by all the European countries, regardless of cultural boundaries. The research showed two things; one, that the PlayStation pre-launch was already perceived as a powerful machine and two, that fast-cut 'yoof' TV advertising was simply not going to work.

'We always had the objective of taking the PlayStation to the mass market and appealing to a broad range of potential consumers. We took a structured approach to do that through a traditional marketing mechanism of reaching early-adopters first', says Simon Jobling, head of marketing for SCEE.

Power was a concept that translated admirably across borders, and from mid-Summer a series of executions appeared showing a man's head exploding.

'The campaign was really in two halves,' explains Mike Perry, of Simons Palmer. 'Pre-launch, which was the single piece of imagery that said power – that was an exploding head. It's basically something that blows your head off and it's dangerous, all those overtones. That single image has gone everywhere across Europe from point of sale to print advertising in various forms, you may have seen the bloke's head actually explode at ECTS in London. The thought was simply to tell people that Sony were bringing out this very powerful product.

'However, for the launch we wanted to do something completely different. The pre-launch featured a very traditional approach to the advertising but we wanted to try and explode the whole thing with a campaign idea that moved away from the fast-cut images and heavy metal track – MTV land if you like – which all our research had shown was becoming a bit of a cliché in this marketplace. We came up with the idea of a typical barmy American organisation that was actually anti-PlayStation. A bit like a sort of McCarthy period, Reefer Madness organisation who were dedicated to suppressing the world's most powerful computer games. It's a classic keep off the grass idea.'







The Sony ads used a mad US pressure group because all of Europe could laugh at it. Handling the account were Mike Perry (top left). SCE's Simon Jobling (left)

Simons Palmer took great care in imparting realism to the series of eight TV ads, even down to hiring American lighting technicians to give the illusion of a US production. 'It was supposed to look like a mad organisation in the middle of America,' says Perry.

The 'don't do it, it's dangerous' angle is a tried and tested standby in the youth market but according to Perry, the American dimension to the adverts is the key to their success. The whole of Europe had to buy into the underlying concept and the one common denominator across the occasionally fractious continent is its desire to laugh at Americans. By taking it to a third party, Simons Palmer created something that would be universally appreciated.

Unusually for a pan-European campaign, individual territories were allowed to tinker with the wording of the ads and tailor them even more specifically for their home markets. The result is a series of mildly insulting acronyms in nine languages. In France SAPS becomes CAPS (French for idiots), in Germany something else etc.

It's also been designed as a through-the-line campaign, one that will allow the unhinged fictional organisation to crop up in a number of places.

Phil Harrison: 'There are some things that we're doing with the SAPS concept. We could, for example, have people parading as SAPS outside stores warning you not to go in and buy a PlayStation. We've got some press advertisements where the SAPS character warns you of the dangers of a PlayStation. Now logically, if he's telling you not to buy a PlayStation, in theory he could start to suggest products that are approved by SAPS.'

No prizes for guessing what they could be. 

Virtua Fighter 2



Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	AM2
Price:	£50
Release:	January (UK)

With 1.5 million advance orders in Japan alone, there is no doubt that *Virtua Fighter 2* is a title with immense standing. Sega needs it to reaffirm its own status in the videogame company premier league, gamers need it because of a lack of software and the Saturn needs it to prove it can do amazing things when asked. *VF2* needed to be good for so many reasons. It isn't just good, it's amazing.

All the basics from the original *Virtua Fighter* are in evidence: the easy three button control mechanism, the fluid camera movement, the eight primary fighters and the compulsive play. However, there are many improvements and additions to this basic recipe which not only keep the *VF* series in line with its competitors, but in key areas, clearly allow it to surpass them.







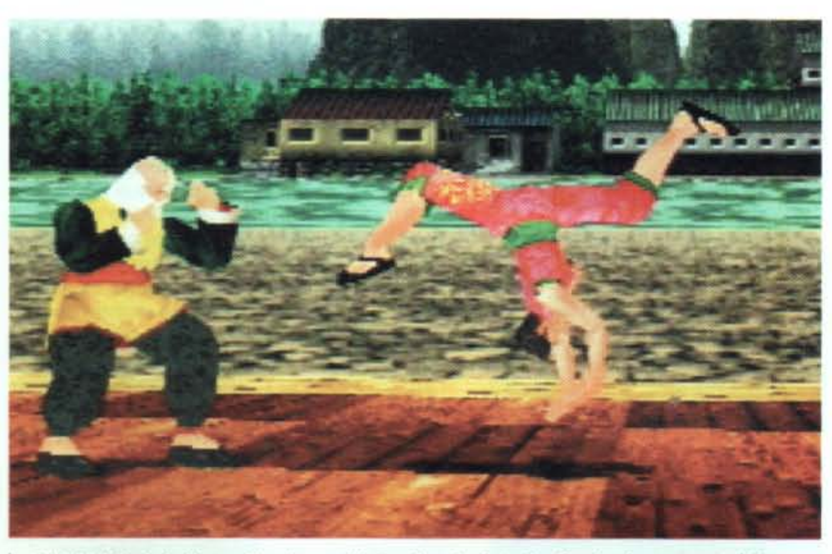
***VF2* runs at the maximum speed of 60fps on the NTSC version Edge reviewed. Sega Europe have asked AM2 to ensure the PAL version doesn't suffer from a squashed screen. Although the PAL version will run at 50fps, it's possible AM2 will optimise code to make it just as fast**

Visually, *Virtua Fighter 2* has no equal. Using the Saturn's highest screen resolution (704x480) and running at the same speed and elegance as the coin-op (60 fps) it is, quite simply, a staggering achievement. It captures the graphical finesse of the state-of-the-art coin-op with few compromises. In fact, those familiar with the original Saturn game could be forgiven for thinking this was running on an entirely different machine.

As with the original, *VF2*'s warriors possess a real physical presence, accentuated by the animation which has such a high level of purity that the smallest, most intricate differences between the characters and their movements are visible and even exploitable. For example, Lion, one of the two new fighters, looks elastic and ductile, and this is so well conveyed by the animation that



Pulling off special moves like this clothes line is surprisingly easy with the simple control method



Pai's kickflip is both an offensive and defensive strategy. In attack, she can pummel her opponents faces with her feet. In defence, the move is a swift way to escape damage

the player is inspired to adopt a more athletic approach to battle – darting in and out on the opponent with quick, jabbing attacks.

There are an incredible 50 to 70 moves per fighter, ranging from low-key alternative kicks, punches and elbow thrusts, to more noticeable throws, flying attacks and devastating combos. Character-specific moves are mostly used to compliment the player's skill, rather than make up for a lack of it. Many are barely perceptible as specials: Kage's heel kick and Sarah's forward jumping round-house, for example, are undramatic but effective strikes which merge with the standard moves. This is in no means a complaint – it adds a fluidity to the action which can be destroyed when games rely too heavily on extravagant specials. Nevertheless, there are some spectacular hits. Sarah's jumping clothes line and Wolf's throws (including the 'variation German suplex' with which you pick up your opponent from behind and smash him on his head) being amongst the more flamboyant.

There are several more reasons why *VF2* is a totally rounded beat 'em up experience. There are no unblockable moves, meaning that the style of battle is moved away from 'who can execute the killer move first' to 'who can formulate a series of attacks and counter-attacks'. *VF2* is a game that supports both cerebral and instinctive gamers at once, but, in the long run, favours the former.

Furthermore, the designers of *Virtua Fighter 2* are fully aware of the importance of recovery and counter attack. Each character has a move that will get them off the ground quickly when knocked down, and there are plenty of specials that involve, and work in conjunction with, defensive moves.

Virtua Fighter 2 features two new characters: Lion, and Shun – an amusing old drunkard who sways around the arena looking as though he is in permanent danger of collapsing. This should not be







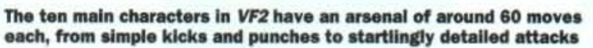
VF2 has two intro sequences. The first (top) is a superb realtime demo while the second (middle) is pre-rendered. A new Saturn inclusion is Team Battle mode, where each player picks five characters to fight on their team











The ten main characters in *VF2* have an arsenal of around 60 moves each, from simple kicks and punches to startlingly detailed attacks







Wolf pulls off a twirl and hurl on Sarah (top). Sarah gets it again, this time being brainbusted by her brother Jacky (middle). Lau finishes a heavy pounce on Shun (above)

Continued

misinterpreted for ineptitude though – Shun can pull of some excellent moves, most impressive of which is his handstand kick. Surprisingly, he can walk around on his hands for some time, repeatedly pummelling his opponent in the face with his feet.

Although it's pretty close, *Virtua Fighter 2* isn't quite perfect. Admittedly, there are few problems, but that makes those present all the more annoying. Contact between fighters can be imprecise and uncertain and the player never gets the same feeling of connection that *Tekken* provides. Often, special moves that look as though they are going to do massive damage merely sink into the opponents chest. Sometimes, you don't believe the opponent is feeling the blows, making pulling off a complex move a touch less satisfying.

A lesser problem is jumping which, as in the original, is comparatively slow and has the fighter floating for some time. In the interests of continuity, each character's movement through the air should be as swift as it is on the ground, but this isn't the case. The minimal gravity makes it difficult to use jumps as a tactical element to fights and, as the fighter can execute only one movement while airborne, they are extremely vulnerable. However, Pai can perform a quick backflip to get out of tricky situations, whereas Akira has a leap – complimented by some follow-up attacks – which will get him straight back into the fray. Jumping to escape is not essential.

The sound is possible the least impressive element. Most of the tunes fail to match the original's and the sound effects, although rather bass-y, lack any really satisfying crunches and cracks.

Of course, the question on everybody's lips will be: is it as good as *Tekken*? As a package, *Tekken* is more invigorating with better music, more characters and harder action. There is also a greater atmosphere of danger and violence in the Namco title, perhaps due to the more threatening characters and the exaggerated sense of



One drawback of *VF2*'s use of playfields is the dreadful 'floating arena' seen after a ringout

physical impact during conflict. When attacks make contact in *Tekken*, the hits can be really felt. *VF2*'s cast is superbly designed but is also a combination of rather pretty and/or humourous fighters, making the action slightly lightweight. This carries over into the moves: at times, they feel hollow and weightless, despite their obvious physical bulk.

Certainly in some respects, *VF2* is graphically more advanced and impressive than Namco's game. The backgrounds are a definite improvement with complex, well-drawn and interesting hi-res scenery that scales in and out (to obscure the lack of polygons from which its coin-op parent benefited). But the use of a distorted playfield for the actual arenas unfortunately engenders an embarrassing 'floating' effect where the floor hovers above the scenery.

Where *VF2* really overpowers *Tekken* is in its longevity. Given the sheer depth of play, Sega's game has an exceptionally steep learning curve, proven by the fact that the game is still a hit in Japanese arcades a year after release.

In terms of faithfulness to the arcade original, *VF2* gets closer than *Daytona*, *Ridge Racer* or just about anything else. Given that the *VF2* coin-op is still among the most advanced CG hardware in the arcades this is an achievement in itself. Furthermore, the conversion adds features not present in the original. There are several new play modes – including Expert (where the computer learns from the player's moves) and Team Battle (in which two players choose five fighters each to compete against each other). Most important, though, this game is beautiful to look at, excellent fun to play and incredibly addictive.

In many ways, *VF2* is the ultimate technical showcase. It's a game with interesting characters, imaginative structure and a long, long learning curve, that will keep players in front of the screen for months. It's also a game that fully supports each individual player, whatever skill level they are at, and it is so graphically stunning, it's almost as much fun to watch as it is to play.

State of the art.



The secret opponent in *Virtua Fighter 2* is Dural, a gold or silver, highly polygonised female fighter who appears in this strange, Atlantis-like setting. Although Dural is not particularly stunning visually, the swaying, watery background really does impress





Edge rating: **Nine** out of **ten**

Yu Suzuki on Virtua Fighter

Yu Suzuki, the creator of the *Virtua Fighter* series as well as key coin-ops, *Out Run* and *Virtua Fighter*, recently spoke to **Edge**'s sister magazine Next Generation about *VF2* and its long awaited coin-op sequel...

NG Which AM2 game are you most proud of?

YS Of all my games, my favourite is *Virtua Fighter 2*. First of all, I think the 3D computer graphics were well received as a new medium of expression. Put another way, I think this added a sense of reality to each punch and kick that wasn't there in previous games.

As well as expressing human motion, it also made it possible to feel the weight of each movement. Also, an element that I personally like is the counter moves. Up until now, the player simply held the guard button and couldn't attack during that time. But in *VF2*, skillful use of the guard button enables you to go on the offensive with a counterattack, and this adds significantly to the depth of the game.

NG What can we expect from *Virtua Fighter 3*?

YS *Virtua Fighter 3* will be a game in which the fighting is closer to actual martial arts, with character motions that are more realistic than either *VF1* or *VF2*.

NG In *Virtua Fighter 1* and *2*, the characters are modelled in 3D and the camera angles are 3D as well, but the action that the user controls takes place along a 2D plane. Will this change in *Virtua Fighter 3*?

YS The fact that the game is 2D from the players perspective probably won't change in *Virtua Fighter 3*. If the viewpoint changes rapidly during gameplay, the player can't concentrate on the game. I can't say anything for certain, because the final decision hasn't been made, but I think *VF3* will remain 2D in that sense.



The *VF2* coin-op differs from the Saturn version by fully realising the 3D backgrounds, rather than using scaling bitmaps to create an illusion of 3D. This 3D bridge is not possible in the Saturn game



Continued next page

Lau Chan











Lau's disciplined movements more reflect a gymnast than a fighter. His heavy pounce (middle right) is a controlled and drilled move – he slams his feet into his opponents stomach, jumping up and down a couple of times. Other special moves include the waterwheel drop (top right), where he carries his opponent over his shoulders, the cartwheel kick (above) and the sweeping kick (bottom right)

Lion Rafale











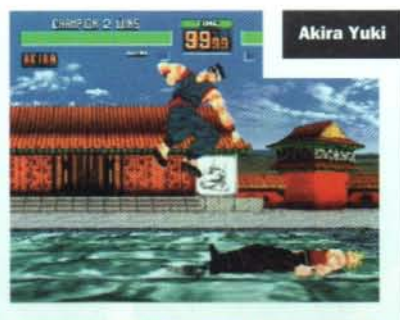
Frenchman Lion's flexible body enables him to pull of some bizarre and spectacular moves. His piggy back attack (above) is a stunning assault from behind, whereas the one-handstand kick (top right) shows Lion's agility in combat. The long range fist thrust (middle right) is indicative of Lion's quick attack strategy. The reaping throw (bottom right) is another example of Lion's strange and supple physique

testscreen

Akira Yuki











Akira is the standard martial arts-type character and is thus most likely to be adopted by newcomers to the game. He is capable of performing quick and easy hits, followed by more impressive special moves when necessary. He can trip opponents over his forward leg (stumbling throw, above), or charge into the action, winding the other fighter (dashing body check, middle right)

Kage-maru











Kage-maru is the ninja fighter of the *VF2* arena. His toka throw (above) whips the opposition quickly around and slams them to the deck. Kage's high pounce (above right) concludes in either his head or feet crushing his opponents stomach. One of Kage's more spectacular moves is the ten foot toss (bottom right), where his opponent is flung through the air to plummet down onto the floor

Pai Chan











Pai Chan, one of the two female characters in *Virtua Fighter 2*, is similar to *SFII*'s Chun Li in character – whenever she wins she dances and jumps around the arena. However, her combat moves are far removed from her *SFII* counterpart. The wrist twist (top right) pulls her opponent to the floor from behind, whereas the backward kickflip (middle right) can be used to great effect if the positioning is accurate

Shun Di







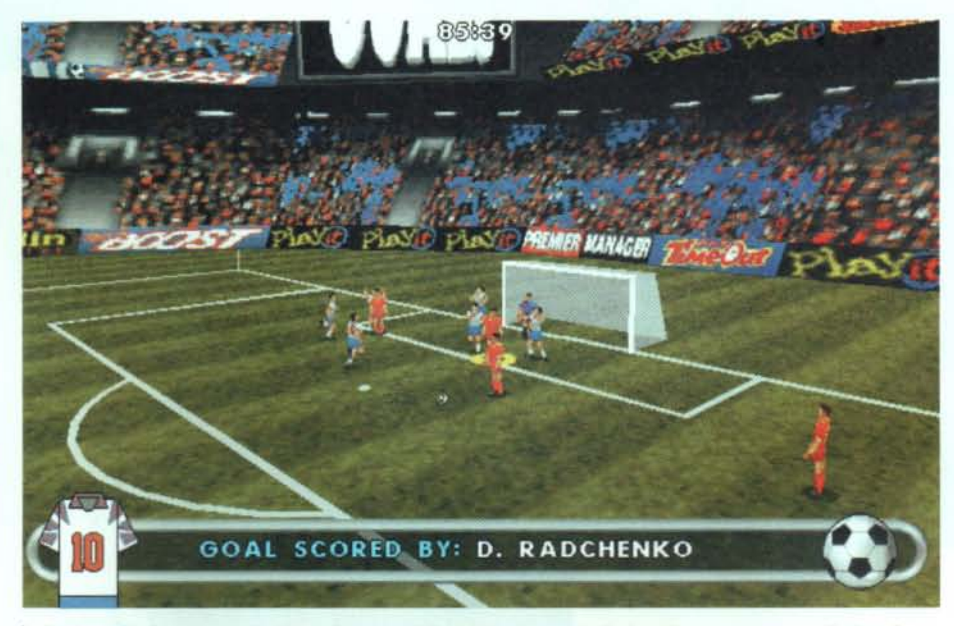




Shun Di, one of the new characters to *VF2*, is an old drunk who swaggers around in a deceptive way. His short height enables him to avoid some heavy blows and his old age belies his agility. Shun's mule kick (above) slams two feet firmly in his opponents face, whereas the scissors kick (top right) grabs his opponent by the neck and twists them to the ground. Shun's breakdance sweep (middle right) is great fun to watch

Actua Soccer

Format:	PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	Gremlin Interactive
Developer:	In-house
Price:	£44.99
Release:	Out now



Goal scoring is not easy in *Actua Soccer* and the computer-controlled goalkeepers are an agile bunch. The most reliable method of scoring is to pounce on a rebound or slot it home while the keeper is down







***Actua*'s main innovation is the highlights that surround the feet of the controlled player, indicating possession and correct positioning for delicate chips and crosses**

Gremlin's *Actua Soccer* has all the features that have so quickly become standard in the genre. Within the space of a year, motion-captured animation, 'intelligent' commentary, 3D stadiums and dynamic game cameras have gone from being ground-breaking innovations to the routine requirements of any serious soccer sim. But however far the goalposts have moved, football games remain basic beasts. Simple, fluid playability and tactical versatility are still the key ingredients no matter what colour the surface gloss.

But it's the gloss that you can't help looking at in *Actua Soccer*, starting with the giant-sized player on the menu screen, practicing his ball skills and showing off the excellent animation. The naturalistic look was achieved by capturing the movements of three Sheffield Wednesday players. In-game this translates to over 40 separate moves for the outfield players and hundreds of individual frames of animation.

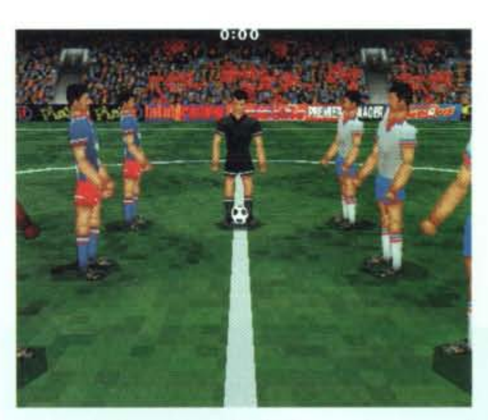
All this animation does give *Actua Soccer* a vivid feel – players chest down balls and sidefoot passes through defenders – more convincing than the more cartoon-like approach of the arcade-bred console titles. Up close, the textured players are very impressive, in both VGA and SVGA mode, and help to give the game some character. There is something a little mechanical about all the animations, though, most obviously in the goal scoring celebrations where all the players repeatedly punch the air in an identikit way.

But, unlike so many of its footballing counterparts, *Actua Soccer* has successfully managed to integrate its animation without seriously hampering the player control. Moves



***Actua Soccer* uses international teams only and Barry Davies knows every player's name**





There's no doubt the animation in *Actua Soccer* is some of the best seen in any football game. However, as has been said time and time again, it's the gameplay that differentiates outstanding from acceptable







***Actua's* eight views vary from the spectacularly pointless to the practical and playable. The camera can also be placed with the mouse**

are executed swiftly, animations don't interrupt the game and only the sliding tackle is agonisingly drawn out. A two-button system makes basic passes and shots available and a cleverly designed player highlight attempts to expand the scope of the game without overcomplicating things.

The player you control has a highlight around his feet which changes according to the state of play. Without the ball, he's got a circle around him. If he's in possession it's a triangle and it flashes when he's in shooting range. When the player in possession is in a good place to cross, the highlight changes to a square – press a



Because of the constantly moving camera, positioning balls, to the often minuscule team players, can be a testing and arduous chore

button and he'll try to loft the ball into the box. Similarly, if the highlight changes to a star, you'll be able to play a first time ball with a tap of the button including headers, volleys and overhead kicks.

Other moves do require slightly complex combined button presses and releases – notably disguised passes, chips and dummies – but the basic moves are enough to play a decent game. In practice, *Actua Soccer*'s controls are certainly better than the lethargic *FIFA* series but don't quite have the instinctive, intuitive feel of the best Japanese titles and the ever-playable *Sensible Soccer*.

Sensi's endurance is due in no small part to its wide view of the action which brings tactical versatility and makes flash graphics redundant. Of course, flash graphics are a major part, arguably *the* major part, of *Actua*, which gives the game one serious problem – what view to take during play. It's a problem that Gremlin have only half-solved. There are eight different views of the pitch and far too many of them are pointlessly unplayable. The referee view and the individual player views are next to useless and a manual camera is tough to position with the mouse. A stadium view is playable but reduces everything to a pinprick and a goal line camera is useless if play is going towards the goal the camera is behind.

In addition, there's a playable *Sensi/Kick Off*-style overhead view which is scalable but seems to have trouble keeping up with the ball. Then there's an isometric view which apes *FIFA* – again playable, but never 100% comfortable, just like *FIFA*. Thankfully, at least one view manages to show off the graphics without compromising the game – the wire view which moves the camera on the fly. It shows enough of the players to be able to admire the animation and enough of the pitch to make passing practical. However, and this is a problem with all *Actua*'s views, getting a shot on target is a real skill, since with the constantly changing viewpoint it's not easy to precisely direct a kick even with aftertouch.

A cosmetic triumph, *Actua Soccer* has some of the best animation around. It's also got a hypnotic floating camera that dazzles onlookers. And it's got what's unquestionably the finest commentary from the lucid, enthusiastic, but never over the top Barry Davies. What it doesn't have is that touch of brilliance, a flash of genius that would turn its team of solid components into a great rather than merely good soccer sim.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**

Hexen







***Hexen* caters for three types of player-character. Main: the cleric is a good all-rounder, strong yet capable of reasonable magic. Top right: the mage is weakest physically, but is magically adept. All the mage's weapons are long-distance. The fighter is physically superb, but useless with spells**

Format:	PC
Publisher:	GT Interactive
Developer:	id/Raven
Price:	£44.99
Release:	Out now





***Hexen*'s monster count is high and varied. Gas spitting demons and swamp serpents feature highly**

Only a few months ago *Heretic*, Raven's previous *Doom*-engined medieval romp, languished unloved in shareware hell. Bland and uninvolving it failed to capture the imagination of either the public or the developers themselves, who aborted the project and returned to the drawing board. The fruit of their current labours, developed with id in an 'executive production' role, is not only a colossal advance over *Heretic*, but *Doom* too. *Hexen* is quite simply the best 3D action game yet to grace our monitors.

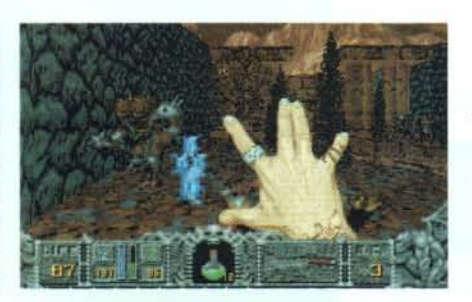
Retaining *Heretic*'s sword and sorcery setting, *Hexen* requires you to pulverise and puzzle your way through an array of traditional fantasy scenarios and hostile creatures. You are now, however, afforded the opportunity to cast yourself in one of three roles: a fighter, a cleric, or a mage, each boasting different physical attributes and (more importantly) four different collectable weapons. Furthermore, longevity, as well as variety, is assured because the game plays differently depending on the character selection.

Once underway, the first noticeable thing about *Hexen* is the attention that has been lavished upon its sinister, forbidding appearance. The architectural detail, spectacular lighting effects (creeping panels of moonlight, glowing ethereal bands that literally chase you down corridors), and the sheer diversity and quality of the textured 3D is a joy to behold and a testament to the strides Raven and id have made with the *Doom* engine. Moreover, the dark beauty of the game environment is packed with imaginative flourishes that greatly add to its credibility: leaves fall off trees, ice shatters and tinkles to the ground, water currents tug at your legs.

Of course all this finery would be for nought if the gameplay didn't cut the mustard but it is in this very department that *Hexen* really triumphs. Spurning the 'level one, level two...' monotony that has ultimately marred many games of this sort, the programmers have employed a 'hub and spoke' design to excellent effect. In any one level, once the correct switches have been pulled, keys found, and the necessary puzzle pieces discovered, you will reveal at least two two-way portals leading to further areas with further portals to be activated and so on. In this way, it is never long before your game area encompasses at least three distinctive environments each with multiple access points to each other, with actions in one







In level two the player is thrust into a world full of twisting caverns and mineshafts, all mysteriously connected to an ancient deserted temple that shows signs of macabre death rituals. The attention to detail in *Hexen* is astonishing, ensuring that even the most critical of gamers will be satisfied

inevitably having foreseen or unexpected consequences in another. In all, there are over thirty levels radiating from around eight hubs. That's a lot of game. In fact, paradoxically, the game design's biggest strength is also its only weakness for the simple fact that if you find yourself lacking a particular key you can be faced with a dishearteningly large number of possible (interconnected) locations.

Still, the game areas themselves are richly variegated and never less than stunning to look at so there's always motivation to see more and seldom any resentment at revisiting conquered territories. Mist-shrouded swamps, dank subterranean warrens, ruined Arcadian temples, and creaking caverns of ice, just to name a few. And all populated by an ever-expanding array of foes (there are 15 in all) including double-headed ogres, shape-shifting wizards and weed-hung swamp serpents. A vast improvement over the feeble (nay comical) 'monsters' clogging the corridors of *Heretic* though perhaps a little cartoony for some tastes and still, like their ancestors in *Doom*, bitmapped and pixellating furiously up close. Gentlemen, your polygons please...

Beyond the simple pleasures of agility and brutality, the struggle to navigate and gain mastery over these creatures and their pesky dwellings is lent an extra dimension by a range of artefacts that can be found and stored until appropriate moments. These powers and spells include anything from time-delay bombs to a statue that turns your enemies into squealing piglets. Coupled with the more general enhancements that Raven have made to freedom of movement, like the ability to look up and down and fly, these make the



***Hexen*'s zoom in, zoom out, auto-updating map assists for players lost in the spiralling labyrinth. The map retains the 'D&D' feel remarkably well**



player's interaction with the game constant and ever-changing.

Thankfully, one thing never changes: the unfettered butchery of your enemies with increasingly powerful and exotic instruments of destruction. Although there are twelve weapons in all, only four are available to any one character class. But rest assured, the gear you do get your hands on (which is not always straightforward – the really serious weapons must be assembled from four hidden components) is pretty awesome: the cleric for example comes to wield a little baby called The Justifier which unleashes a shrieking whorl of wraiths that quite literally tear your adversaries apart.

Hexen is not a revolutionary game. Most of its features have been seen in one form or another before. But its heady brew of searing action, thoughtful structure, and characterful design, wedded to great technical prowess, is a major evolution in what we should expect from 3D games. It's fun, frightening enough to have seasoned *Doom* veterans pitching backwards over their chairs, and deep enough to reward many days of play. Prepare for the era of the *Hexen* clone.

Edge rating: **Nine** out of **ten**





Top: shredding enemies is easy with hands that fire lightning. Bottom: freezing monsters is great fun

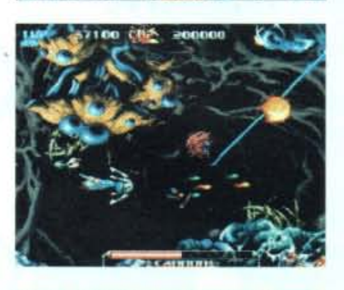
Pulstar

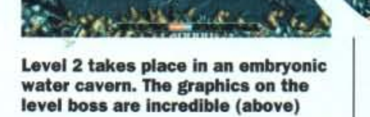
Format: Neo Geo CD
Publisher: SNK
Developer: Aicom
Price: £45
Release: Out now





Level one gently introduces the player to the action, as well as paying homage to *R-Type* by producing almost indistinguishable graphics





Level 2 takes place in an embryonic water cavern. The graphics on the level boss are incredible (above)

Precious few games can genuinely claim to have significantly shaped genres, but Irem's *R-Type* is one that qualifies without question. Now, eight years since the mould-breaking shoot 'em up's coin-op debut, its designers have broken free from Irem's disseminated coin-op division and formed an independent team called Aicom. Their first labour is *Pulstar*, a game which patently reworks many of *R-Type*'s themes to produce an effective mix of nineties presentation and eighties gameplay.

Controlling a ship very much in the style of *R-Type*'s famed R-9 craft, three methods of attack are available. A stab of the fire button looses off a short burst of fire, while holding it down charges a power meter – both methods familiar to the *R-Type* series. The third attack is something brand new, though: rapidly press the fire button and the power meter charges in reverse – which, depending on the weapon currently in possession, offers effects such as wider shot coverage and even force-field-type beams









Level 3 kicks off with impressive lava flames (top). The giant ship which follows is another patent *R-Type* homage (middle and above)



The set piece which closes level 4 makes excellent use of SNK's hardware: an egg bursts to reveal a snake which transforms into a giant crab-like boss





which encompass the craft. Couple these with the use of a second fire button – which, among other things, locks the direction of fire of any multiples in tow – and a remarkable range of attacks are possible. Sadly, similar advances haven't been made with weapon pods, which remain fixed to the front of the ship. The potential for *R-Type*'s detachable drone pod concept – where it is fired into groups of enemies or attached to the front or rear of the craft – is exciting and it's a mystery why Aicom didn't explore it with equal fervour.

But if the game updates *R-Type*'s gameplay in a rather half-baked fashion, it more than compensates with its graphics, which are the best yet seen on SNK's five-year-old console. Adopting an unusual approach, *Pulstar* uses traditionally created sprites and backdrops plus a selection whose origins lie with graphics rendering workstations. From the smallest to the largest of enemy characters the evidence is clear, with a crisp, clean look to all its elements, an incredible level of detail and enormous bosses which call upon a breathtaking range of animation frames. And unlike Atari's *Trevor McFur In Crescent Galaxy*, *Pulstar* marries the two styles in an uncannily convincing style.

With game design ostensibly that of the eighties, *Pulstar* continually asks the player to learn the aliens' attack patterns. Whether it's a giant segmented creature attacking from the rear of the screen or an enemy suddenly firing from a seemingly innocent orifice, if the player doesn't know they're coming they have little more than good fortune to cling to in getting through unscathed. Frustrating maybe, but it's something that will be transcribed by hardened coin-op fans simply as classic gameplay. And unlike both *Philosoma* and *Rapid Reload* on the PlayStation, which ape ageing themes to distinctly limited levels of success, *Pulstar* is the bona fide article; the work of a team who cooperated with the likes of Konami – whose *Gradius/Nemesis* series garnered similar acclaim to *R-Type* – in fashioning the template which would be followed by countless game designers in subsequent years.

The game is tough – if admittedly a little short, levels-wise – and packed to bursting with action, serving as an excellent reminder of how exciting such a simple concept can be when executed with copius flair and sharp attention to detail. Its structure makes the arcade its ideal home, but *Pulstar* will equally find favour with a console audience having suffered a painful dearth of decent shoot 'em ups in recent years.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**



Level 5's otherworldly flora theme is in stark contrast to previous stages

Hang On GP '95

Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	In-house
Origin:	Japan
Price:	¥5800 (£40)
Release:	Out now (Jap)



Although the game looks impressive, what these shots fail to convey is your bike's poor interaction with its surroundings and with other racers on the course. At times you can survive scrapes with little more than a judder, at others the smallest clip will send you rolling across the tarmac







***Hang On* offers three tracks featuring diverse, if not detailed, texture-mapped scenery. Look out for bridges, tunnels, and lakes**

Inspired by arcade classics *Hang On* and *Super Hang On*, Sega's latest enters a market already saturated with quality racing games. In order to compete, it needed to be an imaginative, well-designed game fully exploiting the alternative handling characteristics of the motor bike. Unfortunately, it is anything but.

Problems become apparent from the first few seconds of play. For a start, the bikes, with their highly exaggerated swaying movements, manage to defy the laws of physics. Even when the vehicle is travelling at 10 mph, one touch on the left or right of the joypad will have the player leaning over until their knee is touching the ground. This failure to modify the bike's movements in relation to its speed is indicative of very sloppy coding and fails to capture the riding experience.



One interesting gimmick is *Hang On*'s pit stop. As the player draws to a holt, his bike is besieged by clambering technicians

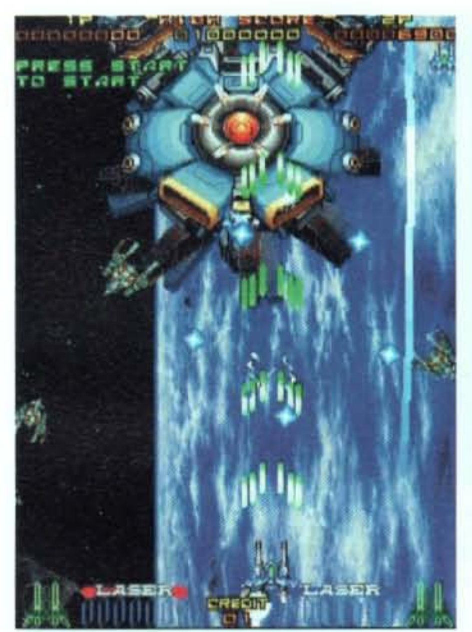
Worse than this, though, is the awful bike sound effect – a kind of high pitched buzz which is rather like the noise a fly makes when trapped between two panes of glass. The music that plays throughout the game is equally dire. What Yamaha sound chip?

Despite these flaws, *Hang On* does retain an element of playability. There is a convincing feeling of speed and a certain amount of excitement when approaching a check point with three seconds left, or speeding past the race leader. Furthermore, the bike corners well and the power slide option is excellent when employed correctly. However, all this can be found in *Daytona* or *Ridge Racer* – games which offer the added bonus of believable vehicle movement and detailed scenery.

Hang On shows all the signs of a promising concept fobbed off to a B or C development team where poor programming and lack lustre design result in a game that has little new to offer. Whatever the case may be, *Hang On GP '95* looks rushed and, to use a rather sentimental term, uncared for.

Edge rating: **Six** out of **ten**

Layer Section





Turning the TV on its side enables *Layer Section* to be played as it should (left). For those scared to risk it, the screen is shrunk to fit vertically (right)

Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Taito
Developer:	In-house
Price:	¥5800 (£40)
Release:	Out now (Jap)
Supplied by:	Dream Machine 2
Tel:	01429 869459

No matter how tightly the video games industry embraces a polygon enriched future, the ghost of the 2D scrolling shoot 'em up will probably never be exorcised. There is something instantly gripping about this type of game, something that allows an archaic genre to keep a foothold in the savagely progressive market.

Layer Section – a vertical scroller – deviates little from the blueprints set down by classics like Taito/Toaplan's *Flying Shark* and *Tatsujin* series. It is what you would expect from a proficient shoot 'em up: the pace is hectic, the screen is constantly ablaze with laser fire and the end of level baddies are deadly and persistent (if not as impressive as those in *Pulstar*). The weapons are rather disappointing, though, with no powerful air to ground bombs to allow for strategic carnage – instead there's a rather dull targeting system.

What makes this title stand out though, is its adroit use of the Saturn's scaling chip, employed to give the illusion of depth. Often enemy fighters will fly in from above or below your ship and then descend/ascend into firing range. Backgrounds, too, will fall away beneath your craft to reveal alternative landscapes, and cloud layers part to uncover land that, due to some clever parallax scrolling, looks as though its miles below. The space missions also boast an array of unusual Mode 7-esque background effects with stars spraying across the screen in pulsating waves. Touches like these ensure the 2D shoot 'em up has not become visually redundant.

Layer Section does have down sides. The gameplay lacks variety, despite being based on a one year-old coin-op (Taito's *Ray Force*). However, to berate it for a lack of originality is rather pointless. This game is, by its very nature, unoriginal. Nevertheless, *Layer Section* is faultlessly presented, carefully designed and fun to play. Not quite the visceral blast that *Pulstar* represents, but definitely an adequate homage to a genre that's had one foot in the grave for several years.





***Layer Section* follows to the letter the text book guide to writing a vertical shoot 'em up – big explosions, power-ups, and end-of-level bosses**

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**





The Saturn's 3D capabilities are also used in the game. Sprites scale with little pixellation and texture-mapped 3D scenery races by

Crusader

Format:	PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Origin
Price:	£49.99
Release:	Out now







***Crusader* is full of dramatic explosions (left), as almost everything in the game is combustible. Main: a scientist makes the interesting discovery that his rad suit does not double as a bullet-proof jacket – civilian employees of the Consortium are often innocent victims in the midst of a gun fight**

PC developers currently seem to be in turmoil over the machine's direction. Should they try to copy the next generation consoles, or treat the old timer as a separate entity? For the moment, Electronic Arts have chosen to take the latter route with *Crusader*, a thoroughly involving arcade adventure.

Unfortunately, the first thing you notice is the struggle to adapt to the lumbering control method. The left and right cursor keys rotate your character, only the up and down keys actually move him. Once mastery of the controls is complete, there is an abundance of more complex moves to be employed such as run, roll etc. Luckily, these moves are only needed as you progress – you're not expected to learn everything at once.

Crusader consists of a series of hit and run missions. The character you control is a member of a rebel force battling against a high-powered business consortium. On each level he beams into an enemy building, kills everyone (except any prisoners he has to rescue), destroys all important equipment and beams out. However, there's more to this than barbaric shooting and maiming – each location offers a series of problems to solve (doors to









Video footage, interspersed throughout the game, features members of the rebel alliance with hints and advice on the mission in hand (left). At the end of each mission the player returns to the rebel base which has its own bar (centre). Here the player can talk to other rebels (who curiously all sit alone at separate tables), and buy weapons from a shady arms dealer. Some levels enable the player to control robot sentries (right)





The player often has more to contend with than just security guards. Electricity conductors deliver a nasty shock and seriously drain energy (left). A sentry machine gun opens fire automatically and traces the player's movement across the screen, while a transporter pad beams in back-up (right)

open, access keys to find, laser fields to shut down etc) that lift this game above the standard shoot 'em up by offering a higher level of playability.

Crusader is also a game that eases the player into the action, introducing themes slowly, so that later, more allusive problems can be solved using past experience. Although stuffed with rooms and corridors, the game is essentially linear in that the pass key found in one room opens a door in the next. The layout does increase in complexity, though, and often you can wander through the same area for some time before discovering how to progress. This confusion rarely bores, however, and perhaps this is why *Crusader* succeeds where other puzzle-filled arcade adventures fail: the solutions to problems are always logical.

The exceptionally well-designed locations all have a futuristic, industrial look to them – pipes leaking steam or fire, conveyor belts, pylons, etc. This graphical quality is inherent in all aspects of the game. For example, when human guards are killed, they drop to the floor and ooze puddles of blood. There are plenty of security droids, sentry cannons and wall-mounted guns to destroy too, complete with truly impressive explosions.

There's a marvellous selection of weapons to collect during the game including land mines and, better still, spider bombs. When released they crawl across the floor and greet anything in their path with a huge explosion. You can also loot dead bodies for their ammo and credits (the latter can be used to buy new weapons and equipment).

Something which may worry more masochistic gamers is the player's resistance to death. The complex is littered with med-kits and med-booths which both restore health, making death a remote prospect for the cautious player. Added to this, the game is saveable throughout. However, the LucasArts adventures have proven that the constant threat of death is not necessarily a pre-requisite for a gripping video game. Danger is constantly present in *Crusader*, even if it is not immediately mortal.

However, with play, problems do emerge. Perhaps Crusader's largest flaw is that the visual style, although impressive, doesn't differ throughout the game. Consequently, the enthusiasm for discovering new locations and beginning new missions wanes as the chance of new graphics becomes remote. Furthermore, the game play could have gained





Security droids patrol each enemy building and have to be dealt with carefully (left). The isometric design allows players to see several levels of the building layout at once (right)

from offering a greater variety of cerebral problems to solve – most of the difficulty comes from locating door passes.

Nethertheless, this is exactly the sort of game that works well on the PC. Previous attempts to compete on the same level as the consoles (*FX Fighter* and *Screamer*) have produced adequate, but disappointing results. The PC is capable of producing games of a complexity and intelligence that console games could rarely manage to achieve. *Crusader* is proof of that.

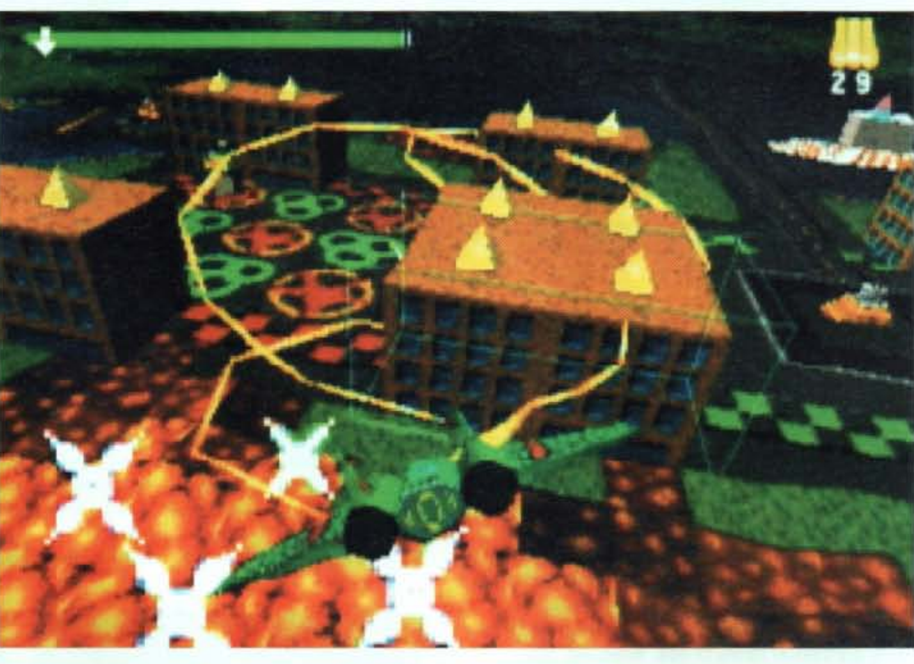
Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**

Star Fighter

Format:	3DO
Publisher:	Studio 3DO
Developer:	Krisalis
Price:	£45
Release:	November







The beam laser (above) is a visually impressive, if somewhat random, weapon. One striking graphical touch is the ground scorching that results from the fighter's gratuitous barrage of firepower. *Star Fighter* includes a varied environment (bottom left), but the size of the map is rather limited.

This has been a comparatively good month for flight sims. *War Hawk* represents a significant improvement over previous PlayStation effort *Ace Combat*, and *Star Fighter*, the latest 3DO blast, will do the machine no harm at all.

In many ways *War Hawk* and *Star Fighter* are similar games. Both are futuristic flight shoot 'em ups and both consist of a series of missions in which the objective is to neutralise static targets (buildings, missile bases, etc) and take out enemy fighter craft. Perhaps the most eminent comparison between the two, though, is that, like *War Hawk*, *Star Fighter* manages to get the basics of the flight sim just about right and then compliments them with an array of special features.

The first thing the player notices about this game is how it feels to fly the craft. The control method employed in *Star Fighter* takes a few missions to master and there are a couple of eccentricities in the handling which need to be compensated for. For example, it is impossible to perform a conventional loop-the-loop (for want of a more technical definition) – instead, when the fighter reaches the extremes of either a downward or upward pitch, it simply flips over and reverses incline. This makes dog-fights much more difficult and unfortunately detracts from the reality of the flying experience. Turning can also be a problem at first – the fighter is extremely





***Star Fighter*'s explosions consist of a myriad of psychedelic shapes which gently float skyward, man**





Complementing the psychedelic nature of the explosions are some equally trippy lighting effects, such as the elaborate sunsets (left) and the planet's aurora, seen from higher altitudes (right)



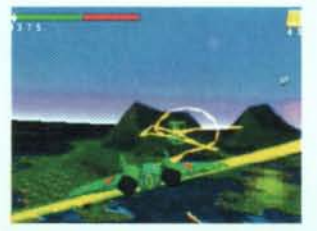






***Star Fighter*'s landscape features a variety of contrasting buildings, all of which are destructible given enough hits. However, to speed up the gameplay, severe distance clipping takes place, meaning some essential targets are invisible until the last moment, when they pop up unexpectedly**









Certain weapons lock on to a target and give a tracking display, characterised by a fine grid which surrounds the object

sluggish to veer, unless the boosters are engaged. Even then the acceleration they provide often seems inadequate. There are times, mostly in the middle of hectic air fights, when the player must evacuate to escape death. This is rarely possible though, because the boosters don't kick in with enough speed to escape. However, despite the irregularities, after a lot of practice flight does become intuitive and enjoyable with a real feeling of inertia and momentum as the craft swoops over landscapes and through space.

The gameplay has its good and bad sides. The missions are slightly more complex than those in *War Hawk* and there is a greater attempt to create a plausible environment for the action. The player is given a lengthy briefing before each section begins and, unlike *War Hawk*, many of the missions have naturally enforced time limits (ie players are told to complete certain missions before enemy space cruisers arrive to pulverise them). However, although there are loads of missions accompanied by elaborate briefings, they are all quite similar in design: despite the frills, it's basically destroy enemy object and return to mothership everytime. There is one interesting innovation: some missions require the player to command a squadron of fighters and guide them into combat rather than rush in solo. This inclusion of allied fighters adds an interesting 'friendly fire' aspect to chaotic mid-air gun fights. Furthermore, due to the sheer volume of things to annihilate, coupled with the fact that almost everything fires back at you, playing *Star Fighter* becomes a tense and involving experience.

As competent as any flight system is, it needs a good 3D engine. The one employed in *Star Fighter* is fairly smooth with little judder, making flight a slick, graceful experience. The landscapes on planet missions are competently drawn and the topography is varied, but rather barren.

The mostly ambient soundtrack beautifully compliments quiet moments when your craft is sailing over open valleys, and also contrasts amicably with hectic fight scenes. Sadly, some techno has managed to find its way into the game as well. This is a shame because the ambient score provides a welcome change and really does work. Rarely does music become such an important part of a game of this sort.

Star Fighter is a consistent improvement over recent arcade-style flight sims. Although it contains a few flaws, it is undeniably exciting. Most importantly, it achieves that elusive quality of making you feel as though you are actually flying.



After each successful mission the player has to dock with the mothership. Harder than it sounds since the craft is constantly circling the map

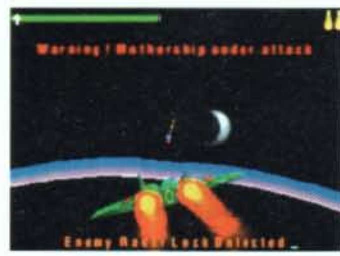
Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**





Gameview (above) shows enemies attacking from the rear. Flyby (top) does little to enhance the gameplay





The asteroid level (top) is speedy, but hard to navigate. Radar messages predict trouble (above)

EDGE magazine January 1996

War Hawk

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Sony Imagesoft
Developer:	Singletrac
Price:	£44.99
Release:	November



Level one introduces the importance of protecting the craft's shield. As with all *War Hawk*'s levels, enemy fire appears from all directions, all at once

Next gen consoles have so far failed to deliver when it comes to quality flight sims. Both *Ace Combat* on the PlayStation and *Wing Arms* on the Saturn have been lacklustre affairs, severely tarnished by poor scenery and boring missions.

On the surface it looks as though *War Hawk* has followed the lead set by its predecessors. Apart from the science fiction setting, the missions available are frighteningly similar to those in previous titles. For example, *War Hawk* manages to cover the 'destroy the building by shooting its several gun posts' theme and the 'fly through a canyon (replicating the Death Star attack finale to *Star Wars*)' theme in just its first two missions. How galling it is to see console title after console title plunder previous releases for the same old gameplay ideas.

However, originality is a luxury. What matters most is that the game is playable. Luckily, this is an area in which *War Hawk* has the edge on its 32bit flight sim rivals.

War Hawk succeeds where *Ace* or *Wing Arms* failed due to the fact that, although the missions are formulaic, they are highly elaborate, chaotic and great fun. At the beginning of each level there is so much to destroy – both on the ground and buzzing around you in the sky – that the screen is constantly filled with explosions. There's a great variety of targets (drop ships, gun emplacements, other aircraft, gun boats, etc) and an equally impressive selection of weapons on offer. Best of all are the swarm and lock-on missiles. Both of these will automatically centre on targets so you can zoom over enemy installments, destroying them without even altering your course.

The fiddly control method is a nightmare to begin with and the alternatives to the default setup are, as expected, just badly disguised variations on the same nightmare. However, once the keys have been mastered, the craft can be intricately controlled, enabling complicated manoeuvres at incredible speeds.









The canyon level includes a gorgeous green sea, which reflects both land and enemy craft. At the end of each section a rotating gun emplacement must be destroyed









The purpose of level three is to destroy enormous floating fortresses that pummel the war hawk craft with incessant fire. Added to this constant barrage of laser fire are swarms of enemy aircraft assigned to protect the motherships

It is also possible to hover, adding to the feeling of total autonomy that the player has over the ship and especially helpful for taking out several objects right in front.

The rejuvenating shields that surround your craft are a welcome touch, improving game longevity. If, say, the left shield is failing, the craft can be turned so that it takes fire on its right flank, allowing the left to recoup. Because damage is reversible, escaping gun fights in order to rejuvenate becomes a significant addition to the usual tactical scenario.

Another important aspect of the game is the unintrusive radar display. In both *Ace Combat* and *Wing Arms* the player is literally spoon fed with the whereabouts of the enemy (in the latter, the player is 'treated' to a huge red arrow which points in the direction you have to go). The radar system in *War Hawk* is much less domineering and actual credits the player with some semblance of intelligence – it points out the main areas of activity and leaves you to it. In other words, the player is free to roam the skies and take out enemies in what ever order he likes. This non-interfering style, coupled with the fact that sustained damage knocks out the scanner altogether, means that flying with *War Hawk* is a much more tense, almost realistic, experience.

The graphics are rough at times, and a little bland on the first level, but some visual treats are in store as you progress through the game. In mission four it is possible to fly above or below the cloud level: below it, the sky is misty and overcast, whereas above, there's glorious sunshine and some trippy lighting effects. The huge drop ships also look marvellous.

War Hawk is a surprisingly entertaining and addictive release. While it doesn't differ enormously from previous flight shoot 'em ups in terms of mission styles and presentation, it edges ahead in the important areas of weapon choice and enemy diversity. However, the most vital advantage *War Hawk* has over its rival releases is the diverse flying experience the game offers. It is possible to guard the craft through analysis of the shield, to hover allowing more tactical scope, and to plan attacks without an explicit radar display.

Mindlessly copying a formula is boring and totally uncreative. Singletrac have played with the arcade-style flight sim genre, tweaked it here and there and released a game that is at least a refreshing slant on a much abused game style.









Level four takes place above and below the cloud level. As your craft breaks through the shadowy clouds, a stunning sky scene is revealed (top left). The volcano (bottom) is the most visually impressive element of this level, spewing flaming lava into the atmosphere

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**

Namco are responsible for some of the most influential games ever. The company has just released a PlayStation CD containing six of the best

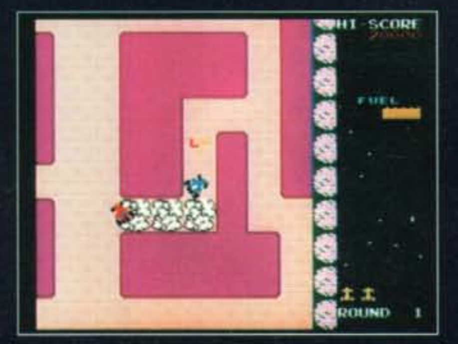
Namco classics

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Namco
Developer:	In-house
Price:	¥5800 (£40)
Players:	One or two
Released:	Out now (Jap) UK – TBA





Even today, *Galaga* (left) and *Pac-Man* still prove to be horribly addictive. The PlayStation versions are, of course, identical in every way to the original coin-ops





Toypop (above) and *Rally X* (top). After a pre-rendered intro, the player enters a realtime 3D museum (above right) in which the player can select each game from its own dedicated room



When the form of entertainment known as videogames took a stranglehold on the youth of the early eighties one company stood above the rest in terms of gameplay and sheer addictiveness. Namco's gameography reads like a top ten list of all-time classics. With the current interest in retrogaming, it's no surprise that Namco have decided to revive some of the world's most popular coin-ops for the PlayStation.

First in the collection is *Pac-Man*, the most played maze game in history and one of the most famous videogames characters of all time. Even 15 years on, *Pac-Man* is still as enjoyable as when it first appeared in 1980. The Namco PlayStation disc includes the original games with different screen modes.

Rally X does not have the same familiar ring as *Pac-Man*, but still has all the traits of an arcade classic. A sort of *Pac-Man* with cars, the player has to race around a track collecting flags and avoiding enemy cars. A small radar gives the player a chance to locate all the flags. A second version, *New Rally X*, is also included which boasts better background music and special power-up flags.

Perhaps the most challenging game on Namco's first collection is the seminal *Galaxian* derivative, *Galaga*, which also recently appeared on the Super Game Boy. For those who have not sampled the frenetic and compulsive gameplay, it's an experience not to be missed.

While *Toypop* and *Bosconian* qualify as the most obscure inclusions on the CD (although the latter was converted to the 8bits), the oldest game of the bunch, *Pole Position* (from late 82), makes up the first of a planned series of five CDs. **Edge** will review the completed game next issue.

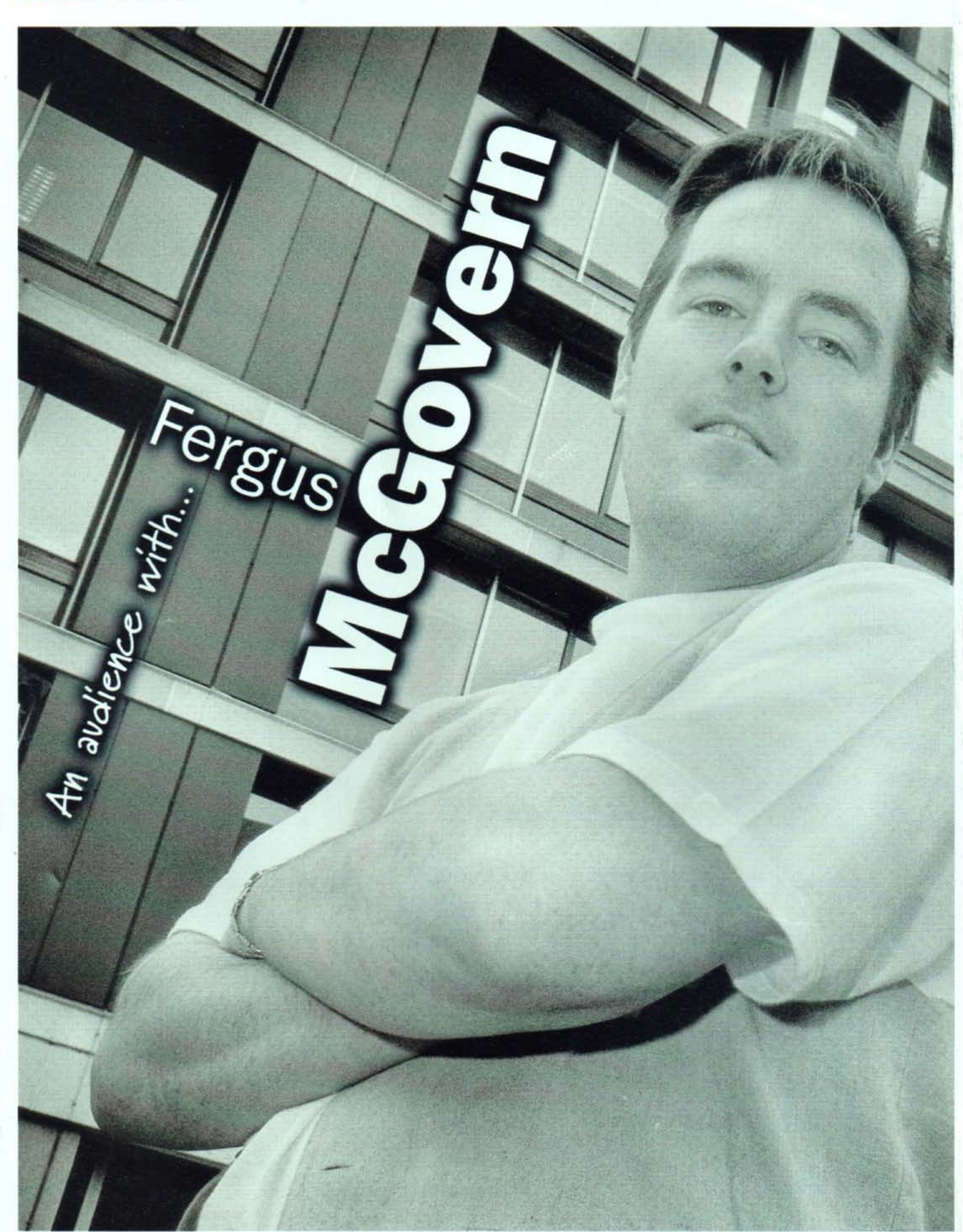




Vol. 2 of Namco's PlayStation *Museum Piece* series (due February 1996 in Japan) includes *Xevious* (left) and *Mappy*



Like *Rally X*, *Bosconian* includes a scanner to locate your enemies


An audience with...
Fergus
McGovern



Probe software have just signed the marriage contract with US games giant Acclaim, making the Croydon-based coders a cool £60 million richer. With the honeymoon spirits still circulating the Probe offices, **Edge** asks, how does a development company build such a million dollar reputation?

Probe Entertainment are arguably the games industry's equivalent of eighties pop hit factory Stock Aitken and Waterman. Since their foundation in 1984 over 400 titles have generated an excess of $1.6 billion in retail sales, yet it's a struggle to remember any one distinct, ground-breaking hit. A production line of mediocre arcade conversions in the '80s led to the infamous 8bit *Out Run*, an appalling imitation of a state-of-the-art coin-op. Videogame journalists scorned this embarrassing copy but unsurprisingly the game was phenomenally successful, topping the charts for a ridiculous nine months.

In the '90s the quality of Probe's output began to improve. Games like *Mortal Kombat 2*, *Alien³* on the SNES, and more recently *Alien Trilogy*, finally enabled the company to receive the seal of approval from the games press.

And now Probe's fortunes have taken another turn for the better. Just recently the company merged with rampant US software house, Acclaim, who have lately acquired developers Iguana and Sculptured

Continued next page

interview

Software. This was another notch to Probe's bedpost – the deal cost Acclaim a rumoured £60 million.

So how has Probe matured from a jobbing codeshop into a desirable multi-million pound powerhouse? Perhaps thanks to their MD, Fergus McGovern, who founded the company 11 years ago.

Known to his colleagues as 'the Governer', McGovern has just been given the title of Acclaim's Vice President of the New York Office. **Edge** spoke to him at Probe Entertainment's Croydon-based HQ.

Edge How did you get started in the computer games industry?

FM Really as a direct result of my neighbours becoming overnight millionaires. About 13 years ago my next door neighbour bought her husband an Apple computer for Christmas. Shortly afterwards he found he couldn't buy software for it and so joined a user club. When his wife flew to California to visit her ill father, one of the club members asked if she could buy them a copy of *Visi-calc*, a spreadsheet program for the Apple II, whilst there. Returning from the US my neighbours suddenly realised they had stumbled across a software El Dorado when they were offered £2000 for the program. They made about £1800 on just one program – the software had only cost $400 in the US. After mortgaging their house, they went to the states, bought a shedload of software and counted the cash. I was their third employee and my brother Kevin, who's Probe's financial Director and Operations Director, was the fifth. We both worked there on Saturdays for about three years and got a real feel for the computer business.

Edge So how was Probe set up?

FM One of my friends, Vakis Paraskeva, was writing games for Romik Software for the C16 and C64 including *Multi-Synthesiser*. I was quite young at the time but I eventually persuaded him that we should get together and work for ourselves, with him writing the games and me handling the sales and marketing. Our first game was *Escape from Alcatraz* which did okay and allowed Vakis to go on to write a C16 game called *Dirty Den* before moving on to an Amstrad CPC 464 to produce our most successful game at that time, *Devil's Crown*, written by Brian O'Shaughnessy. After this we licensed one more product on the Amstrad and then concentrated on our first conversion which was to take our own Amstrad game, *Devil's Crown*, and convert it to a Spectrum.

At this time we were publishing our own software but after a much publicised PR stunt with a dwarf we decided not to publish the Spectrum version. Instead we took it to Frank Herman at Mastertronic who bought it off us. After that experience we concentrated on developing games for other publishers, letting them add their own marketing expertise and take their own risks – it's interesting to note that very few of them have used dwarves following our experience.

Edge What do you remember as milestones for Probe as a young development company?

FM I remember several key events – getting games into Harrods, Dixons or Boots the Chemist; getting a first mention in a magazine and getting the first front cover are all real highs for a young company. I still remember the excitement of our first number one – it was as if we had officially become a proper business. Shortly after, this was topped by *Out Run*, a number one title that sat in the charts for nine months. I firmly believed that there was nothing that could top the feeling. However, our success with that game didn't end there as it scooped nine of 11 awards at the Golden Joystick Awards that year – best music, best 8bit game etc.

Edge How did Probe jump from 8bit games to the cartridge market?

FM Our first cartridge game was *Sega Chess* which was produced directly for Sega Japan on request. This was originally brought to us via Frank Herman, who had bought some games from us previously and was in discussion with Japan involving the setting up of Sega Europe. Frank's brief to me was this: 'Sega Japan want you to do a Master System chess game but you've got five months in which to do it. They want to test you out, check what you can do. Make sure this happens.' It seemed impossible. It takes years to write a chess program but Frank didn't care, 'Just do it!' This was the big break that we were looking for in order to break into the console market but Frank's brief seemed impossible to achieve. We eventually found an electronic chess board based upon a Z80 chip – the same chip that was used in the Sega Master System. We then found the author of the code, licensed it from him, stripped out the bits that communicated with the hardware on the chess board, made it into some chess code for the Z80 and strapped some Master System graphics to it. It worked and we finished it in four months and passed it to SEGA Japan. That was it – we were official console developers

Edge What factors would you attribute to the amazing longevity of Probe as a developer?

FM One thing's sure. Probe's success has nothing to do with luck. We've always made our own luck through sheer hard work. Also, we've always treated our programmers extremely fairly. We've always treated them as individuals and because of that we've attracted some of the best talent that has been out there. If you look at some of the games that have come from individuals such as Dave Perry and Nick Jones [now key players at Shiny Entertainment in California] and lots of the teams that we've used in the early days, these have all been quality people who we've treated right. It's also important to remember that a business needs to be fun – it must be creative but it has to be run in a professional way. Many companies fail

because they are set up by programmers who are good at what they do – programming. I never had any illusions that I was any great programmer or even good at the financial and accounting side of the business. So when my partner Vakis left, I was pleased to have my brother Kevin join to handle the legal and financial side of the company whilst Joe Bonar and Tony Beckwith dealt with the project management side. I also understood that you must look after your artists, programmers and designers. You could fire every single person in this business apart from the people who create games, and the business would survive quite happily. They are the number one priority and the key to this business.

Edge The level of resources and technology needed to create bestsellers has changed dramatically since you began. How do you keep up with this ever-changing market?

FM Any new generation of games is marked by the use of a new generation of tools. You soon learn that you need to build those tools and develop a library of proprietary technology which allows you to move from one stage of excellence to the next. As long as developers realise that they must constantly develop new tools, they can structure development accordingly. It's the knowledge that constantly developing these tools is paramount that holds any company in good stead.

Edge So how do games today compare to the old 8bit classics?

FM If you look back at the early 8bit games on the Spectrum and the C64 they all had to be technically brilliant. Since every game pushed the hardware to the limits, playability was the essential factor to set games apart. Today, this playability benchmark seems to have been lost. So many games look beautiful yet lack any real level of gameplay. Hopefully this is something that will set Probe's products apart from the rest in the future.

Edge With the massive cost of game development do you think there is any room left for small, innovative companies who want to try something different?

FM I think there will always be the element of a small developer who goes off and does something original. However it's always going to be high risk – really high risk. Once they've completed the core of what they want to do they have to combine it with filming techniques, motion capture sequences or top quality graphic sequences from an SGI machine, which will be a real drain on their financial and human resources. They can obviously still go out and make the next *Lemmings*, they can come up with a great game idea that is addictive and fun, but alone they cannot make something like *Wing Commander* because of the huge budgets now required. You have to develop a game, maybe shoot a movie and then merge the two together using the latest developments in motion capture, video and music. They also have to develop global products that are multilingual with speech – you must have extensive technical and financial resources to be able to carry those projects though to final product.



Our success has nothing to do with luck. We've made our own luck through sheer hard work

Edge So you're saying small games developers and producers are going to find the going really tough?

FM It was tough enough for Probe in the past – regardless of the fact that we were the biggest independent developer in Europe. Whilst we didn't have any serious problems, we could foresee that development would become more difficult as games became bigger fusions of several styles of entertainment demanding huge resources. Having said that, I believe there will always be small, talented developers who go off and produce code that pushes back the boundaries of what we currently believe is possible. Developers have always done this and I want to make sure Probe is out there supporting them.

If someone comes up with a great idea, we would like to back them, helping to ensure that good games reach the market and are a great success. We certainly have the financial muscle, desire and willingness to work with smaller groups and give them the opportunity to develop their own products.

Edge The future for Probe is now very clearly tied with Acclaim. Does this mean that Acclaim and Probe will be able to take bigger chances with games and hopefully produce fresher, more radical releases?

FM Many new publishers who enter the market from more mainstream entertainment companies keep any copyrighted characters or licenses [such as licenses to develop games of movies] to themselves. Consequently this reduces the licenses available, which could affect Acclaim as much as any other publisher. This was an argument used repeatedly to criticise Acclaim in the past but I think we have addressed this by signing up Warner Brothers just last week, which compliments the other high-profile properties within our studio.

Acclaim has also been criticised for having no internal development or resources. Again, they addressed this almost immediately by mergers with Probe and Sculptured to add to the already good reputation of Iguana. Acclaim seem to have a higher management that is truly visionary, having sold 10% of the company to TCI giving them links to the US telephone and cable industry. They have also bought the comic book company Voyager Comics and invested in all areas of entertainment. They have stepped from the

Continued next page

interview

old model of games development into a position where Acclaim is well placed to meet the challenge of the next generation of gaming, taking Probe with them as an independent unity within the company.

Edge So what do you see as Acclaim's major benefits from the deal?

FM As a former independent developer, we had to constantly develop across all major platforms. Now we can still keep the Probe identity, the Probe culture, the Probe way of doing things but we are suddenly in a greater position. With Acclaim's backing we have the resources to do what we really want to do – to not only combine games with excellent licenses, but for the first time to pursue original projects and even some of the more wacky ideas that may spawn new properties or licenses in themselves. All this will be for the benefit of Acclaim.

Edge What do you think of the number of 'next generation' hardware systems now entering the market?

FM I'm worried that there are just too



many platforms appearing. Consumers are being confused with too much hardware and are uncertain just where to place their loyalties. Should they spend money on the latest hardware or wait a few months when another piece of hardware will appear that is supposedly all-singing and all-dancing? That's the worrying thing, as ideally the success of a platform should just be down to the quality of the games produced for it. That's difficult when you're constantly trying to look around the next corner and predict which is going to be a winner.

Edge So which platforms would you like to see the end of?

FM I can't wish some platforms away but commercial profit will always push companies to spend development time and money on platforms that have world-wide market penetration in big numbers. I hope that eventually there will be a limited number of hardware platforms which will have a huge user base. That will allow us to make some really great products that my staff will enjoy working on, instead of having to spend time converting to several different hardware platforms. Until then of course, we will continue to ensure that we have the tools and the technologies that will work across all viable systems, in preparation for the magic day when we can say it's just one, two or three systems that the games will be played upon.

Edge Do you think the current next-gen consoles have huge potential, or will they just cause extra problems for developers?

FM They're all very good at the moment. I come from a background of Spectrums and Commodore 64s so when I look at what the Saturn, PlayStation, Ultra 64 and even the latest spec PCs can do, I get excited by the amazing possibilities for games that could be made for today's hardware. However, the teams are getting much bigger, the games are becoming so much more expensive to make, the highest levels of technology are now needed to handle motion capture and 3D modelling, which calls for state of the art Silicon Graphics machines which in turn have to use the latest 3D software and programming tools. This all makes projects bigger and involves more people. You therefore have to be structured internally so that it is still fun for everyone to work.

If people are not enjoying a project you may as well just pay them to watch TV. People are not going to put their own enthusiasm and effort into a game that is fun to play if they are having a rough time

Consumers are confused with new hardware and are unsure where to place their loyalties

putting it together. It's a constant and changing environment.

Edge Do you feel the newly acquired development possibilities of Acclaim may help to silence criticism that none of the bigger companies really push the boundaries of gameplay?

FM Acclaim has probably always been unfairly accredited, especially within Europe, as a company that lacked the vision and resources that they could have applied to games. The same type of criticism has also been levelled at Probe – if anything, we have both been victims of our own success.

Acclaim have used its strengths in marketing to make games into hits. As a developer, Probe have always delivered good products on time, and have therefore lacked the luxury of being able to really explore new styles of games. With the purchase of Probe, I believe Acclaim are now solidly placed at the forefront of video games. This is a great opportunity for both companies to realise their full potential and not have to play follow-my-leader with the rest of the market by reproducing various game genre time after time. The deal with Acclaim certainly means that Probe will be able to produce products that stand above the rest and help to drive the games market whilst providing real value for money for the players. If we can achieve this, then the sale of the company will have been a great benefit for the long-term success of Acclaim, Probe and the games market in general.

Edge Probe doesn't have as solid a reputation for busting the mould as it does



for busting a gut to get products out on time. Are Probe now ready to take up the banner for the next generation of games?

FM We have some very visionary people here now who are trying to predict the way in which the market will grow, in what direction it will go and what styles of games people will be playing in the future. We are already building tools and games for machines that are not yet in the market. One has to stay ahead of the market in this way – if you just take PC games, it takes 12 to 18 months to develop a game so it's pointless to develop it for any machine less than the best that's available when you start the project. You have to look ahead and that's what Probe are doing with the Acclaim merger. I'm really excited about the future and am now very confident that whatever hardware will be available in years to come, we will be pushing it to its limits as we strive to make technically excellent, yet playable games that the market and consumers want. EDGE

questiontime



Send your **questions** to Q&A, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW

Q Please can you answer the following questions with regard to the Sony Playstation:
1. Will Namco's *Rave Racer* be released and when?
2. What games will LucasArts be releasing for the machine?
3. Is it possible to connect PC speakers to the Playstation for better audio. If not, are there any speakers which will work?

djclarke@pine.shu.ac.uk

A **1.** Namco has made no announcement although it's highly likely that *Rave Racer* will make the journey on to the PlayStation next year.
2. *Ballblazer X* is destined for the PlayStation from LucasArts (programmed by German codemasters Factor 5, in fact) as is a *Star Wars* game – although not the same title on its way to the Ultra 64. Hopefully they will see sense to update 8bit classics such as *Koronis Rift* and *Rescue On Fractalus*, too.
3. Standard audio phono plugs connect to the back of the PlayStation, although if you're using the UK PAL RF adaptor then these will already be occupied. In this case you'll need to connect your TV via the composite video socket (although, as with RF, picture quality is not ideal). The best solution, though, is to get a Scart lead and then buy a set of phono leads to connect your PlayStation to a set of speakers or a Hi-Fi.

Q I currently own a Japanese PlayStation. However, with the UK machine now available I'm concerned with the expected life span of my machine.
1. Will I benefit from keeping my machine, or is the UK machine of equal specification in terms of speed and gameplay?
2. A friend of mine is to purchase an official machine. Is there a chance of linking a Jap and UK machine to play *Destruction Derby*?

Shaun Keevil
Gloucester

A **1.** The UK PlayStation's video display rate can handle both 50Hz and 60Hz but PAL games will only ever use the 50Hz mode to enable compatibility with all UK televisions. For example, if you were to run a PAL version of *Wipeout* on your machine (using the infamous CD swapover trick – which incidentally will only work on the first batch of PlayStations) the game would only run at 50Hz on your 60Hz Japanese NTSC machine. And conversely, if you were to run a Japanese *Ridge Racer* on the UK machine you would get the full screen NTSC version (although in black and white unless you're using an RGB Scart lead). There's no doubt that NTSC consoles will always have the edge over their PAL counterparts although things are definitely improving as Sony's and Sega's latest UK games attest.
2. No. As the two machines will be running the game at different speeds the link will not work.

Q While reviewing *FX Fighters* in **Edge** 24 you state that a game running in VGA will never match the sharper resolutions of the Saturn and PlayStation. However, in **Edge** 25 you said that few games have used the PlayStation's high resolution mode. I was under the belief that the PlayStation's low resolution mode was 256x224 which is lower than VGA at 320x200. Could you please clarify this?

Andrew Bradfield
New Zealand

A PC monitors are far superior to any TV screen and the result is an RGB display that is capable of displaying every pixel clearly – TVs simply blur this giving the impression of less pixellation. Also, when in VGA mode (320 x 200) the PC runs in 8bit colour (256 on-screen) which reduces the amount of detail possible.

Q Do you think that either the Saturn or PlayStation could produce an absolutely perfect version of the brilliant 1986 coin-op hit, *Out Run*?

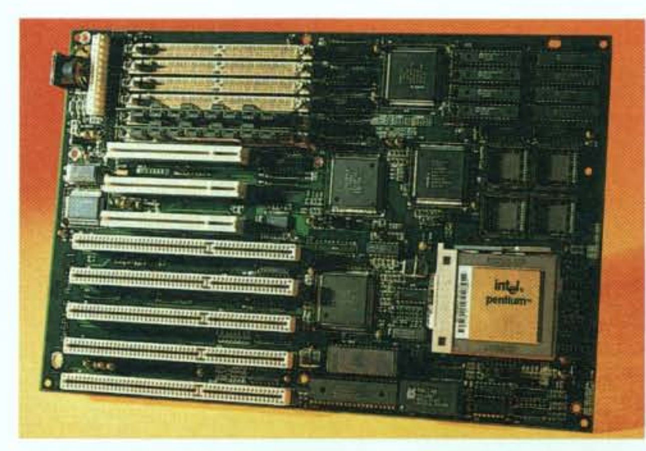
David Bal
London

A For its day, the hardware inside an *Out Run* coin-op was quite revolutionary – particularly in its handling of huge scaled sprites and graduated colours. Given the fact that both the Saturn and PlayStation can expand and shrink bitmaps, there's no reason



***Out Run* was considered state-of-the-art in 1986. Scaling bitmaps and supreme playability guaranteed the title a place in the gaming hall of fame. So where are the Saturn or PlayStation versions, says David Bal**

The PlayStation will not be without LucasArts support. *Ballblazer X* is soon to appear courtesy of Factor 5 (famed for their technically outstanding *Turrican* series on the Amiga). See letter from djclarke



Andrew Bradfield is concerned over the mass of 3D cards waiting to enter the PC market. It's highly unlikely that many will work without a PCI-bus (above). In other words, users will need a Pentium or DX4

why both consoles (and particularly the Saturn with its advanced sprite handling) couldn't emulate the coin-op exactly. There are many differences between the arcade board and a home console and ultimately it mostly depends on the programmers handling the conversion – remember, Sega made a hash of the Saturn conversion of the *Rad Mobile* coin-op (retitled *Gale Racer*).

Q **1.** With Nintendo's claimed 30:1 realtime compression ratio for its U64 effectively giving the first 64Mbit cart a capacity of 1920 Mbits, why is there still a need for the bulky storage add-on?
2. With **Edge** having seen Silicon Graphics demos of what the U64 will be capable of, how does it compare to Sega's Model 2 arcade board?
3. In the 1996 hardware guide why was the Atari section exclusively in red? Did they pay you a few quid?

Ritesh Solanki
Leicester

A **1.** Nintendo's figures are, of course, complete nonsense. Compression rates depend heavily on the type of data being compressed, but for detailed graphics (which will form the bulk of most U64 carts), anything above 4:1 is debatable. The compression in the Ultra 64 is purely based on the very fast processor – there isn't any additional hardware inside for decompression. U64 developers receive a compression utility from Alias and decompression source code, but some developers have yet to be impressed. It's worth remembering that you can take an empty file and compress it at a ratio of 100:1...
2. Few journalists (if any) have witnessed anything running on the U64 chipset and the Silicon Graphics demos shown at CES have proved incredibly misleading. From developers that **Edge** has spoken to it seems that Nintendo's hardware is substantially more advanced than both the PlayStation and Saturn. But then, you'd expect that, wouldn't you?
3. No, Atari didn't line **Edge**'s pockets with silver, it was simply a by-product of a thing called 'design'.

Q With so many 3D cards coming out (the 3D Blaster using the Glint chip from Creative Labs, the NV1 from nVidia, the 3D/100 from LMC, Criterion's card using the Yamaha YGV611 (and many more) plus APIs (Reality Lab, BRender, Renderware) already in use, it is becoming very confusing. Who supports what?

Andrew Bradfield
New Zealand

A There are indeed a great number of 3D accelerator cards coming out, all of which promise spectacular visuals on the lowliest of PCs. Naturally there is going to be a race to establish a standard, as there has been with the sound cards already. Creative Labs appear to be well positioned with their 3D Blaster card. Visitors to the Autumn ECTS will have seen some of Gremlin's software performing on it, although **Edge** doubts that there was anything less than a PCI-bus (Peripheral Component Interconnect) Pentium with oodles of memory underneath the desk playing host to the card. Despite claims that the cards will deliver 'PlayStation beating performance on any PC', the truth is that realistically you're going to need a PCI-bus PC which you'll occasionally find in a DX2/66, but more likely find in a DX4/100 or Pentium. At the time of writing, cards such as Western Digital's Yamaha designed model and the Diamond Edge (nVidia) card are about to be released in the US. Whether there is room for all



Nintendo's Ultra 64 chipset is still shrouded in mystery. See letter from Ritesh Solanki

the emerging 3D cards remains to be seen and the key to their success lies with convincing publishers and development teams to support them.

Q Is the PowerMac able to take *Windows 95* and, if yes, will PC games that say they are compatible with *W95* work on the PowerMac? What other way is there to play PC games on a PowerMac.

Filippos, Arvanitakis
London

A Compatibility with PC software is a grey area on PowerPCs. Currently PowerMacs have the ability to use a Windows emulator called *SoftWindows* but no *Windows 95* support is available yet. The PowerMac can't run *Windows 95* under normal circumstances, because that operating system is written for a completely different chip – the Intel range and its imitators. But there are a couple of ways round your problem:
1. Apple offers a device called the DOS Compatibility card, which is an Intel 486 DX2 chip on a card that you can slot into your Mac or PowerMac. There are currently cards for the PowerMac 6100s and 7100s, with more on the way. And next year you can expect to see a Pentium chip running off a PCI card, which will slot into any of the latest PowerMacs – the 7200, 7500, 8500 and 9500 – and their successors. The cards share your Mac's CD-ROM, floppy and hard drive. They also share your Mac's memory; so if you have, say, 16Mb of memory in your PowerMac, you should be able to install *Windows 95* and use it with the DOS card. The cards are also SoundBlaster-compatible and cost around £490. For more details contact Apple on 0800 127753.
2. The easiest and cheapest way to play PC games on the Mac is to buy the Mac versions! You can get excellent conversions of *Doom II*, *Descent*, *Dark Forces*, *Full Throttle*, *Wing Commander III* and many others for the PowerMac. All of these are as good or better than their PC equivalents. Issue 32 of **Edge**'s sister magazine MacFormat (on sale November 23) includes a free supplement called MacGamer, which features all the latest on the increasing number of Mac games. Expect **Edge**'s recent coverage of the Mac to continue, too.

Q and A

You can depend on Edge to cut through the technobabble and give you straight answers. You can write to us at Q&A, Edge, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW. Alternatively, fax us on 01225 338236, or e-mail us at edge@futurenet.co.uk.

Edge regrets that it can't answer questions personally, by phone, post or e-mail.

Over the **edge**

A heady cocktail of trivia, information, innocuous news stories and some good old-fashioned, rough-cut journalism

Shiny Happy People



Last month **Edge** was invited to sunny Southern California, courtesy of VIE and Shiny Entertainment to be guests at Dave 'Earthworm Jim' Perry's wedding. The exceptionally lofty Perry tied the knot with longtime sweetheart Peggy on board a rather flash yacht that set sail off Laguna beach, Orange County on a typically glorious Californian evening. A good time was had by all, especially those up on deck immediately after the nuptials: beautiful bride Peggy blatantly posed in front of the cameras, wedding dress aloft with white suspenders clearly on view. Which goes some way to explain why the boy Perry made a hasty departure with his loved one as soon as the boat docked...

Feather Trauma

3DO's feather stunt in **Edge** 27 was not one of the most popular ad gimmicks of the decade. Here's one of the better stories **Edge** received as a result of the Dodo deed: A soldier opened his copy of **Edge** three minutes before inspection. The resulting mess was not looked upon lightly by his superiors, who ordered him to work over the weekend as punishment. The aggrieved soldier finished his letter to us with a warning to Trip Hawkins not to try anything similar in the future. Remember, Trip, this man has a gun. **On a more serious note, Edge recognises the distress this ad caused to some readers who suffer from asthma and apologises wholeheartedly for any anxiety caused.**

Edge's Essential Selection: tunes that kept us from the brink of insanity during issue 28:

1. **Leftfield**
   Leftism
2. **Smashing Pumpkins**
   Melon Collie
3. **Paul Oakenfold**
   Perfection
4. **Renaissance**
   Art From The Heart
5. **Beastie Boys**
   Ill Communication
6. **Cyprus Hill**
   Temple Of Doom
7. **Oasis**
   Morning Glory
8. **Nirvana**
   In Utero
9. **Alanis Morissette**
   Jagged Little Pill
10. **Cafe Del Mar Vol.1**

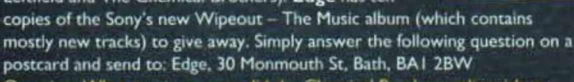
SNK compo



A unhealthy interest in videogames is one thing. But when a London arcade in Oxford Street holds a fancy dress contest to find the best-dressed character from an SNK beat 'em up, something has definitely gone slightly awry. Did the parents of the competitors know what their children were up to that day? When their sons strolled down to breakfast kitted out as Terry Bogard, or perhaps even Geese Howard, did they not think to ask if something was wrong? The Japanese have got a lot to answer for.

Wipeout fever is spreading over the UK bridging the hiatus between popular youth culture and the videogames industry. As well as boasting one of the most absorbing ingame soundtracks ever concocted (courtesy of top beat combos Orbital, Leftfield and The Chemical Brothers). **Edge** has ten copies of the Sony's new Wipeout – The Music album (which contains mostly new tracks) to give away. Simply answer the following question on a postcard and send to: Edge, 30 Monmouth St, Bath, BA1 2BW

Question: What previous name did the Chemical Brothers relinquish to avoid being sued by a well known American DJ combo?



Track listing: **Leftfield** – Afro Ride, **Chemical Brothers** – Chemical Beats, **Orbital** – Wipe Out (P.E.T.R.O.L.), **The Prodigy** – One Love (edit) The Narcotic Suit XL, **New Order** – Blue Monday (Hardfloor Mix), **Age Of Love** – Age Of Love (Jam and Spoon Mix), **Manic Street Preachers** – La Tristessa (Dust Bros. Mix), **Robert Armani** – Circus Bells (Hardfloor Mix), **Angie Brown** – Life Me Up, **Sunscream** – When (K/Class Dub mix), **DreadZone** – Captain Dread (K/Class Pharmacy Dub), **Shamen** – Transamazonia (Deep Dish Rocket Express Mix)

Games consultants... whatever next

Britain's premier independent software evaluation consultancy (sounds posh anyway) is prepared to look at pre-release games and... well... tell development companies whether they've wasted their time and money. Contact Stuart Campbell at Thumbs Aloft on 01225 481957, email: thumbs_aloft@online.rednet.co.uk

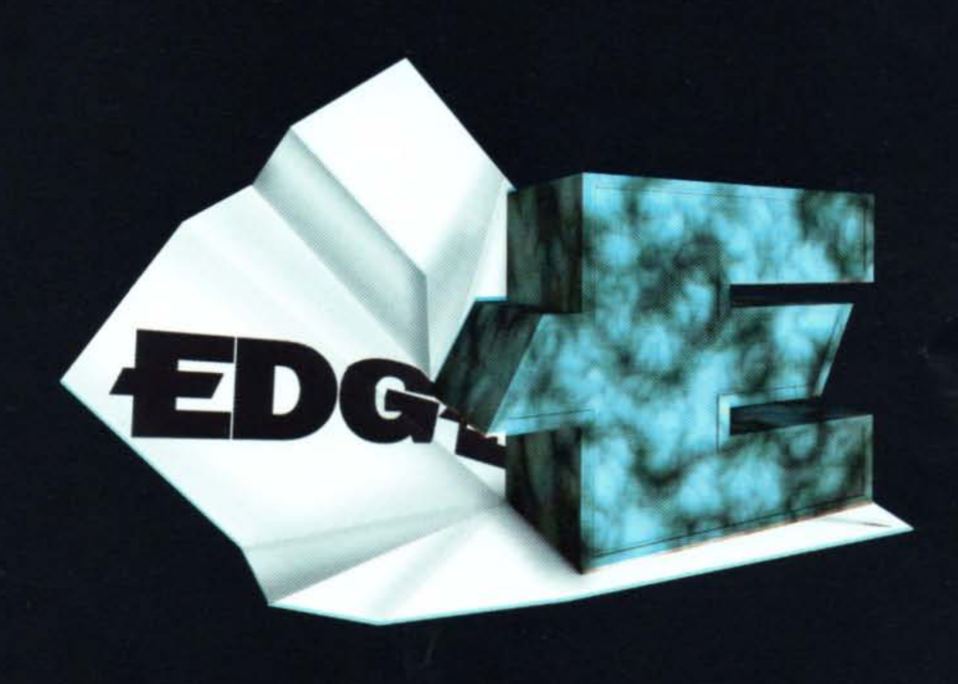
Can't let go of the past?

With the growing retrogaming trend, **Edge** has found a company dedicated to antiquated titles. Contact Retrogames on 0172 781 4043.



Finally, **Edge** has some PlayStation-branded 'serrated cards' to give away. To receive a part of Sony's assault on today's youth culture send your feather incidents to the usual Future address.

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